

DECODING CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

A. 10 YEARS OF CPEC: ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND THE PATH AHEAD

1. INTRODUCTION:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2023, marking a significant milestone in the bilateral partnership between China and Pakistan. Launched in 2013 under the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC aimed to strengthen economic ties, enhance regional connectivity, and provide numerous benefits for both nations. In a global landscape fraught with challenges such as the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, climate change, unemployment, and resource depletion, CPEC stands as a beacon of resilience and cooperation. This initiative has not only weathered these challenges but has also fostered substantial growth in trade between China and Pakistan. Notably, the agri-based sector has witnessed remarkable expansion, exemplified by significant increases in sesame seed and seafood exports, as well as the historic milestone of Pakistan's rice exports crossing one million tons.

Under the Belt and Road Initiative in the past 10 years, 147 countries, accounting for two-thirds of the world's population and 40 percent of global GDP have signed on to projects or indicated an interest in doing so and China's investment in these countries has surpassed US\$ 50 billion and Chinese Companies have set up 56 economic cooperation zones in over 20 countries, generating billions of US dollar of tax revenue and over 400,000 jobs.

(Dr. Hassan Daud Butt | <https://pakobserver.net>)

2. CPEC'S STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE:

CPEC, with an estimated investment of \$62 billion, holds a pivotal role in the BRI. It provides China with a direct and strategic route to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean through the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. This alternative route bypasses the potential chokepoint of the Strait of Malacca, ensuring enhanced energy security and reduced vulnerability to maritime disruptions. CPEC signifies not only a rejuvenation in Pakistan's economic vitality but also a paradigm shift from geopolitics to geo-economics. The strategic emphasis on economic cooperation and development projects fosters a new era of collaboration between China and Pakistan.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS OF CPEC PHASE-I:

CPEC has undeniably contributed to multifaceted developments in Pakistan, particularly during its initial decade. The project brought an infusion of hope and investment when Pakistan faced economic challenges and battled terrorism. Key achievements include economic contributions, infrastructure development, and advancements in the energy sector.

I. Economic Contributions:

China's commitment of \$62 billion investment, with over \$25 billion already invested, has played a pivotal role in Pakistan's economic landscape. The creation of more than 192,000 direct jobs and additional indirect employment opportunities underscores the positive impact on the labor market. The completion of vital transportation projects, such as the upgraded Karakoram Highway and new motorways, has not only reduced travel times but also boosted trade and improved connectivity. The energy crisis in Pakistan has been mitigated through CPEC's energy projects, adding over 10,000 MW to the national grid.

II. Infrastructure Development:

CPEC's significant contributions to infrastructure development include the addition of over 6000 MW of electricity to the national grid, the construction of 800 km of transmission lines, and 510 km of road and highway networks. The development of Gwadar port and a Chinese-funded \$230 million Gwadar Airport has further enhanced connectivity.

III. Energy Sector Advancements:

CPEC has addressed energy crises through the completion of various renewable energy projects, contributing to clean energy production and combating energy-related losses.

The energy sector has emerged as the standout performer under CPEC. Energy projects, with an investment of \$15 billion, have alleviated Pakistan's power shortages, adding over 8,000 MW to the national grid. The focus on clean and green energy aligns with the principles of the National Energy Policy, contributing to sustainable development.

IV. Transport Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure, a key component of CPEC, has witnessed substantial upgrades. Over 809 kilometers of roads are now part of the national network, with an additional 813 kilometers under construction. The ongoing negotiations for the ML-1 railway project and improvements to the Karakoram Highway (KKH) emphasize the commitment to enhancing connectivity within Pakistan.

V. Connecting the BRI Network:

By integrating CPEC into the BRI map, Pakistan assumes a central role in connecting the Silk Road Economic Belt with the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. This trans-continental passage links China with South-East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, Europe, and beyond. The strategic location of Pakistan within CPEC makes it a vital link, bridging the belt with the road network.

a. Connectivity with Central Asia:

CPEC opens doors for Pakistan to establish crucial links with previously inaccessible Central Asian states. The construction of highways and railways, including the Karakoram Highway and the Trans-Himalayan Railway, directly connects Pakistan with Central Asia. This development holds significant implications for landlocked Central Asian Republics (CARs) by providing access to international trade routes through Gwadar port, thereby enhancing economic potential.

Gains for Pakistan: Access to new markets

Integration of CARs into CPEC offers Pakistan access to new markets, reducing dependence on traditional partners and promoting economic diversification.

Energy cooperation: Inclusion of CARs provides Pakistan with access to rich energy resources, fostering energy security and diversification.

b. Connectivity with the Middle East:

CPEC's comprehensive infrastructure transforms it into an all-encompassing corridor, benefitting the Middle East. Enhanced connectivity with the Middle East not only improves Pakistan's trade links but also provides a cost-effective transportation option for goods compared to current Indian Ocean sea routes.

Efficient trade routes: CPEC facilitates quicker and more cost-effective transportation options, making Gwadar a major transit point for trade between China, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Africa.

Strengthened regional position: The connectivity enhances China and Pakistan's economic prospects in the Middle East, fostering economic growth and collaboration.

c. Connectivity within South Asia:

While China and Pakistan welcome the involvement of third parties in CPEC, India has raised sovereignty concerns. However, India's inclusion in CPEC could lead to increased economic benefits, regional connectivity, and cooperation, addressing regional security concerns.

Opportunities:

Economic benefits: India's inclusion would bring economic benefits, fostering regional cooperation and improving connectivity.

Afghanistan's role: CPEC's extension to Afghanistan could further strengthen regional connectivity, with the Taliban expressing interest in joining the project.

d. Connectivity with Africa:

CPEC provides a massive platform for Pakistan to engage with African nations. Utilizing Gwadar port, African countries can stimulate the Pakistani economy, creating new trade opportunities, reducing unemployment, and fostering technological advancements.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES:

Economic stimulation: Integration of Africa into CPEC offers extensive market access, economic diversification, and job creation.

Technology transfer: Collaboration with African countries promotes technology transfer and innovation.

VI. Gwadar Port:

Gwadar Port, a strategic asset in Balochistan, symbolizes China-Pakistan friendship and regional cooperation. Its expansion and infrastructure development, including a new international airport and free trade zone, showcase the potential for diversified economic growth. The port not only bolsters maritime trade but also opens new avenues for economic development. Additionally, vocational centers, and healthcare facilities, including the Pak-China Friendship Hospital, reflects the strategic importance of Gwadar. The completion of Gwadar East Bay and ongoing discussions about the Karachi Circular Railway highlight the comprehensive development agenda.

VII. Job Creation and Special Economic Zones (SEZs):

CPEC's potential to create jobs is substantial, with estimates suggesting around 2.3 million direct and indirect jobs between 2015 and 2030. The focus on SEZs, including Rashakai Dhabeji and Allama Iqbal Industrial City, aims to promote industrial growth, attract foreign investment, and generate employment opportunities. Incentives such as tax holidays and reduced customs duties stimulate industrial growth within the SEZs.

VIII. Global Trade Expansion

Amidst the prevailing global challenges, the trade between China and Pakistan has experienced a notable surge. The exploration of new sectors, particularly in Agri-based products, has resulted in impressive growth. Sesame seed exports, seafood exports,

and the historic crossing of one million tons in rice exports to China showcase the diversification and expansion of trade opportunities.

IX. Belt and Road Initiative's Global Impact

Over the past decade, the Belt and Road Initiative has gained traction globally, involving 147 countries, representing two-thirds of the world's population and 40 percent of global GDP. China's investment exceeding US\$ 50 billion and the establishment of economic cooperation zones have contributed significantly, generating substantial tax revenue and job opportunities worldwide.

X. CPEC's Contribution to Pakistan's Development

Within Pakistan, the CPEC initiative has been a catalyst for positive change. Over 100,000 employment opportunities, 6000 MW of electricity, extensive road networks, and the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) have created rural-urban synergy and regional connectivity. The Blue economy, facilitated through the Gwadar port, exemplifies CPEC's role in fostering sustainable economic growth.

XI. International Collaboration

CPEC has facilitated joint working groups (JWGs) for Agriculture, Science & Technology, and Information Technology. These collaborations aim to explore opportunities in agricultural mechanization, agri-value chain development, corporate farming, and capacity building through research. The addition of new JWGs for Information Technology further emphasizes areas such as optic fiber network expansion, special technology zones, mobile manufacturing facilities, and digital payment systems.

4. CHALLENGES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS:

Despite the successes, CPEC has faced challenges and raised concerns, ranging from economic downturns to issues in the power sector and setbacks in the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

I. Economic Downturn Despite Investments:

Despite substantial investments, Pakistan still grapples with an economic downturn. The injection of \$25 billion by China into Pakistan's economy through CPEC has not translated into a significant economic upturn. The country struggles to attract international investors, raising questions about the overall success and impact of a decade of CPEC.

II. Slow Progress in Special Economic Zones (SEZs):

The development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under CPEC, critical for industrial growth and job creation, faces significant challenges. Only a fraction of the planned SEZs have been approved and initiated, with progress hampered by bureaucratic

hurdles, institutional complexities, and a lack of coordination. The slow implementation raises concerns about the effectiveness of these zones in attracting foreign investment and promoting industrialization.

III. Infrastructure Project Delays and Stalled Initiatives:

Numerous CPEC infrastructure projects, including the Main Line 1 railway project, face delays and, in some cases, have stalled. Beijing has expressed dissatisfaction with the sluggish pace of project implementation, leading to strained relations. Delays in transportation and energy projects hinder the intended regional connectivity and economic benefits, posing a significant challenge to CPEC's success.

IV. Security Concerns and Militancy:

CPEC faces security challenges, particularly in regions like Balochistan, where insurgent groups have targeted Chinese nationals and infrastructure projects. The heavy militarization of certain areas has been implemented to protect Chinese workers, leading to local discontent. Addressing security concerns is crucial for the safety of personnel and the uninterrupted progress of CPEC projects.

V. Regional Disparities and Unrest:

Regional disparities and unrest, particularly in Balochistan, pose a substantial challenge to CPEC's success. Local communities in Gwadar and Balochistan feel marginalized, citing a lack of essential necessities like water, electricity, and education. Protests against perceived differential treatment, coupled with concerns over environmental impact and loss of livelihoods, contribute to regional instability, potentially hindering CPEC's progress.

VI. Controversies and Public Dissatisfaction:

CPEC projects have faced controversies, with public dissatisfaction stemming from labor violations, environmental hazards, and loss of livelihoods. Discontent in Gwadar, highlighted by protests against illegal fishing and security force presence, reflects broader issues that affect the public perception of CPEC. Managing these controversies and addressing public concerns is crucial for the sustained success of the economic corridor.

VII. Institutional Framework and Administrative Bottlenecks:

Pakistan's complicated institutional framework contributes to administrative bottlenecks, slowing down the implementation of CPEC projects. The intricate bureaucracy and red tape hinder the efficient execution of plans and contribute to project delays. Streamlining the institutional setup and addressing bureaucratic challenges are essential for accelerating the pace of CPEC initiatives.

VIII. Unmet Expectations and Economic Default Concerns:

High expectations accompanied the launch of CPEC in 2013, with claims that it would be a game-changer for Pakistan's economy. However, a decade later, the country faces economic challenges and struggles to meet international financial commitments. The gap between expectations and reality raises questions about whether CPEC has delivered the promised economic transformation, leading to concerns about potential economic default.

5. WAYS FORWARD FOR THE SUCCESS OF CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC):

To fully exploit the potential of CPEC, Pakistan needs to consider policy reforms, economic stability, development in Balochistan, and community engagement.

I. Institutional Reforms and Streamlined Governance:

Undertake comprehensive institutional reforms to simplify bureaucratic processes, reduce red tape, and enhance the efficiency of decision-making. A streamlined governance structure will contribute to quicker project approvals and execution.

II. Enhanced Regional Development and Community Engagement:

Prioritize the development of underprivileged regions, such as Balochistan, by ensuring equitable distribution of resources and infrastructure projects. Engage local communities in the planning and implementation process to address their concerns, fostering a sense of ownership and promoting regional stability.

III. Accelerated Implementation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs):

Expedite the establishment and development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to attract foreign investment, promote industrialization, and generate employment opportunities. Focus on creating a conducive environment for businesses within the SEZs to facilitate economic growth.

IV. Address Security Concerns Effectively:

Strengthen security measures to address concerns related to the safety of Chinese personnel and infrastructure. Collaborate with local security forces, employ advanced technologies, and implement strategic measures to mitigate security threats. A secure environment is vital for the uninterrupted progress of CPEC projects.

V. Transparent Communication and Public Awareness:

Foster transparent communication about the benefits and progress of CPEC projects. Implement public awareness campaigns to address misconceptions, highlight positive outcomes, and actively engage with communities. Building public support is crucial for the long-term success of CPEC.

VI. Diversification of Foreign Investments and Partnerships:

Actively seek diversification of foreign investments and partnerships beyond China. Explore collaborations with additional countries and international organizations to bring in a variety of expertise, funding sources, and perspectives. This diversification can contribute to a more resilient and sustainable economic corridor.

VII. Strategic Alignment with National Economic Priorities:

Align CPEC projects with Pakistan's national economic priorities and development goals. Focus on projects that address key challenges, such as energy production, infrastructure development, and industrialization, ensuring that CPEC complements and accelerates the country's overall economic growth.

VIII. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:

Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess the progress and impact of CPEC projects regularly. This mechanism should involve both Pakistani and Chinese stakeholders, enabling timely adjustments, identifying challenges, and ensuring the effective utilization of resources.

IX. Community Engagement:

Addressing local concerns, involving communities in decision-making, and ensuring fair and inclusive development practices will mitigate social unrest and foster a positive project impact.

6. CPEC 2.0: STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC TIES AND SHARED PROSPERITY

The initial phase of CPEC concentrated on establishing power generation plants, building highway infrastructure, and enhancing connectivity. As we move into CPEC 2.0, the economic ties between China and Pakistan are set to become even broader and stronger. The bilateral relationship, which has stood the test of time, will rise to further heights in the future. The comprehensive approach, encompassing industrialization, agricultural collaboration, and technological advancements, positions CPEC as a catalyst for socio-economic development. With ongoing projects and new initiatives, CPEC is not just a corridor; it is a symbol of enduring friendship and shared aspirations for a better, more prosperous future. Under the visionary leadership of both nations, the China-Pakistan community is building a shared future in this new era of global transformation.

Vision for CPEC 2.0:

I. Industrialization and Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision for the Pakistani economy emphasizes strengthening productive sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. In

line with these objectives, CPEC 2.0 is accelerating industrialization by establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in each province. Operational SEZs like Allama Iqbal Industrial City (AIIC) in Faisalabad and Rashakai in KP are already attracting investors, marking the beginning of a vibrant phase of industrial cooperation. The development of Dhabeji SEZ in Sindh and Bostan SEZ in Balochistan further underlines the commitment to widespread economic development.

II. Agricultural Collaboration

China's significant progress in the agriculture sector, which has lifted millions out of poverty, serves as an inspiration for Pakistan. The Agriculture Joint Working Group (JWG) under CPEC, established in March 2020, is actively engaged in collaborative efforts. Projects such as high-quality cotton seed production and collaborative investments in high-value crops signify the potential for a transformative impact on Pakistan's agriculture. Research collaboration between Chinese and Pakistani institutions aims to inject new vitality and global connection into agriculture research efforts.

III. Technological Advancements

The establishment of a Joint Working Group for Science and Technology and the recent agreement for a new Joint Working Group for Information Technology underscore the limitless potential in these fields. With a focus on digital economy, information technology, and social livelihood, CPEC 2.0 is poised to increase collaboration between China and Pakistan, creating new opportunities for economic growth.

7. VISION OF CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been a significant initiative with both Chinese and Pakistani visions aimed at fostering economic and social development in Western China and harnessing the potential of Pakistan's geography and demography. Over the past decade, various international responses have shaped the trajectory of CPEC, with notable reactions from the United States, India, and Afghanistan.

China's Vision for CPEC:

China envisions CPEC as a means to advance economic and social development in Western China, aligning with the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The focus for the next ten years includes accelerating BRI, utilizing Chinese capital to enhance production capacity, engineering operations, technology, and fostering an open economic system.

Pakistan's Vision for CPEC:

Pakistan sees CPEC as an opportunity to leverage its geography and demography by creating new trade routes, industrial hubs, and free-trade economic zones. The country

expects CPEC to promote socio-economic development and regional peace and stability over the next decade.

International Responses to CPEC:

1. United States:

The U.S. response to CPEC has evolved over the years. The Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia" led China to explore alternative routes due to concerns about freedom of trade. The Trump administration expressed reservations, driven by strategic competition and containment policies towards China. However, with the Biden administration, there is a more conciliatory approach, viewing China as a competitor. Cooperation on issues like climate, energy security, and counterterrorism could make the U.S. a crucial player in CPEC-related projects.

2. India:

India has resisted CPEC primarily due to concerns about the corridor passing through regions it claims (Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan) and the project involving two rival nations. India fears that CPEC could strengthen economic ties between China and Pakistan, impacting regional stability. India has employed tactics such as supporting separatist and terrorist groups to disrupt CPEC-related projects, leading to occasional setbacks.

3. Afghanistan:

Afghanistan has recently expressed interest in joining the regional connectivity project, emphasizing deeper economic cooperation. The trilateral dialogue between Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan highlighted a consensus for regional connectivity. Concerns about terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan affecting CPEC security were addressed, with the Afghan Taliban making a written pledge against terrorism. If realized, this pledge could contribute to uninterrupted growth in CPEC-related projects.

8. A DECADE OF SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT: CPEC'S IMPACT ON TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATION, AND COOPERATION

As the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) commemorates its ten-year milestone, the joint efforts of Pakistan and China in various sectors come to the forefront. This article delves into the significant impact of CPEC on science and technology, emphasizing its role in fostering innovation, economic development, and bilateral cooperation.

I. Science and Technology Development:

Over the past decade, science and technology have been at the forefront of CPEC initiatives. Both nations prioritized development projects, including industrial and information technology parks. This strategic focus aimed to stimulate economic

activities, encouraging competition in infrastructure, labor, capital, and other resource markets.

II. Monetary and Technical Cooperation:

The collaboration between China and Pakistan extends to various projects, such as the "China-Pakistan Joint Cotton Bio-Tech Laboratory" and the "China-Pakistan Joint Marine Studies Centre." The monetary and technical cooperation agreement underscores their commitment to scientific advancements, providing a foundation for shared progress.

III. Optical Fiber Cable Project:

The Pakistan-China Optical Fiber Cable (OFC) Project, completed under CPEC, exemplifies the corridor's commitment to information connectivity. The 820 km long OFC link between Rawalpindi and Khunjerab Pass acts as an information super-highway, enhancing communication and collaboration between the two nations.

IV. National Science & Technology Park:

CPEC's venture, the National Science & Technology Park in Islamabad near NUST, reflects a US \$1.5 billion investment to uplift Pakistan's economy. This project aims to transform the standard of living by boosting technological advancements in industrial, agricultural, and technological sectors.

V. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Productivity:

CPEC emphasizes the establishment of SEZs, crucial for diversifying the economy, reducing regional disparities, and promoting technology integration. The focus on technology in agriculture, along with energy projects, contributes to increased productivity and efficiency.

VI. Education and Research Initiatives:

CPEC includes initiatives to support education and research in Pakistan, fostering collaborations between Chinese and Pakistani universities. Joint research programs and exchange programs for students and faculty showcase the commitment to advancing science and technology in the region.

VII. China-Pakistan Joint Research Centre on Earth Sciences:

The establishment of the China-Pakistan Joint Research Centre on Earth Sciences highlights a critical step in academic and scientific exchange. This initiative, focusing on natural disasters, environment, geology, and sustainable development, acts as a model for international scientific and technological cooperation.

9. CPEC AT 10: A CATALYST FOR SOCIO-CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

I. Cultural Exchange through CPEC:

CPEC has become a driving force for cultural interaction, fostering dialogue between the people of China and Pakistan. Collaborative initiatives, such as the construction of the Karakoram Highway and hydropower projects, have facilitated cross-cultural exchanges among workers, creating a shared space for understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures.

II. Tourism and Knowledge Sharing:

Infrastructure projects like the Gwadar International Airport, constructed by Chinese companies, pave the way for increased tourism. This not only eases travel for tourists but also promotes knowledge-sharing, providing insights into the civilization, politics, and norms of both nations. Such initiatives contribute to building sound cultural understanding among the citizens of China and Pakistan.

III. Educational Collaborations and Language Learning:

CPEC has spurred educational collaborations, including student exchange programs between Chinese and Pakistani universities. Language learning opportunities have increased, with numerous language schools offering Chinese language programs, popularizing the language and deepening understanding of Chinese culture. The China-Pakistan Joint Research Centre on Earth Sciences exemplifies educational collaboration, fostering the exchange of ideas between scientists from both nations.

IV. CPEC Advocacy and Social Media:

CPEC advocacy has utilized social media platforms to promote cultural engagement. Events like the 'CPEC Cultural Caravan' showcase Chinese and Pakistani cultures through music and dance, reaching a broad audience and encouraging cultural exchange. The Pakistan-China Institute and universities actively use social media to broadcast updates about CPEC-related cultural events, inspiring individuals to participate in cross-cultural activities.

V. Employment Opportunities and Economic Impact:

CPEC's impact extends beyond cultural exchange to economic transformation. The construction industry, boosted by infrastructure development, creates jobs for workers, engineers, architects, and project managers. Employment opportunities also emerge in the transportation industry, tourism sector, manufacturing, and energy, contributing to poverty reduction and economic growth.

10. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has emerged as a transformative force, marking a decade of achievements, challenges, and the promise of shared prosperity. As a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC has significantly strengthened the economic ties between China and Pakistan, providing a strategic route to the Arabian Sea and fostering regional connectivity. The first phase of CPEC has witnessed remarkable achievements, from economic contributions and infrastructure development to advancements in the energy sector, impacting diverse sectors of Pakistan's economy. However, challenges, including economic downturns, project delays, and security concerns, underscore the complexities inherent in such ambitious endeavors. Looking forward, CPEC 2.0 envisions even broader economic ties, emphasizing industrialization, agricultural collaboration, and technological advancements. The international responses, particularly from the United States, India, and Afghanistan, further shape the trajectory of CPEC, reflecting its global significance. The impact on science, technology, and innovation has been substantial, with collaborative projects and research initiatives enhancing capabilities in both nations. Moreover, CPEC has not only facilitated economic growth but has also become a catalyst for socio-cultural exchange, promoting understanding and appreciation between the people of China and Pakistan. As CPEC continues to evolve, addressing challenges, fostering transparency, and actively engaging local communities will be crucial for ensuring its sustained success and contributing to the shared aspirations of a better, more prosperous future for both nations.

CHARTING A COURSE FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE:

Analyzing Challenges, Consequences, and Solutions in Pakistan

Synopsis:

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CHARTING A COURSE FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

Analyzing Challenges, Consequences, and Solutions in Pakistan

A. AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Pakistan has been trapped in a destructive state of no sustainable growth over the past 5 decades, with a looming risk of default without IMF support."

(Paul Robin Krugman | American Economist)

Pakistan's economic landscape is currently marked by a complex interplay of challenges that require comprehensive analysis. It faces a complex economic landscape marked by a balance of payments crisis, soaring inflation, mounting debt obligations, and a persistent budget deficit. Pakistan's stability increasingly depends on the outcome of an ever-worsening economic crisis. Amid skyrocketing inflation, political conflict, and

surging terrorism, the country is facing the risk of a default due to its massive external debt obligations. This burden has been exacerbated by the derailment of the \$6.5 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) program Pakistan entered in 2019, as the international lender is unsatisfied with Pakistan's commitment to reform and ability to arrange for funds to meet external financing requirements. Troublingly, Pakistan's official foreign exchange reserves are hovering around \$4 billion, which is insufficient to finance even a one-month of the country's import bill.

Pakistan's economy slowed sharply in FY23 with real GDP estimated to have contracted by 0.6%. According to the World Bank's latest *Pakistan Development Update: Restoring Fiscal Sustainability*, the decline in economic activity reflects the cumulation of domestic and external shocks including the floods of 2022, government restrictions on imports and capital flows, domestic political uncertainty, surging world commodity prices, and tighter global financing.

2. CAUSES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS:

I. Fiscal Deficit and Debt Obligations:

Mounting fiscal deficit and external debt obligations pose significant challenges. Examining current fiscal deficit percentages and external debt-to-GDP ratios underscores the urgency of addressing fiscal imbalances and meeting debt service obligations for economic stability. Pakistan's total debt and liabilities have surpassed Rs. 51 trillion.

Current account and fiscal deficits pose challenges, with the current account deficit reaching 3.4% of GDP.

II. Challenges in the Agriculture Sector:

The agricultural sector faces a productivity crisis, with major crops experiencing stagnation in yield growth. Inefficient water distribution systems further exacerbate the challenges. Recent data showcases a decline in crop yield growth rates and highlights the need for modern irrigation practices to enhance productivity.

III. Industrial Sector Struggles:

Pakistan's industrial sector heavily relies on the textile industry, contributing over 60% to the country's total exports. Stringent regulatory processes act as a deterrent to investment, hindering the sector's growth. Comparative analyses with global counterparts underscore the urgency of regulatory reforms to stimulate industrial development.

"Businesses do not flourish in Pakistan due to a non-conducive environment which includes bureaucratic friction, uncertain policies & political instability, among other reasons."

(Business Recorder)

IV. Services Sector:

While the services sector dominates Pakistan's GDP, it lacks international competitiveness. A skilled workforce is crucial to enhancing the sector's global market presence. Examining the share of the services sector in the GDP and international competitiveness metrics emphasizes the need for strategic investments in education and skill-building.

V. Export Sector Challenges:

The export sector faces challenges due to concentration in low-tech, low-end textile products and limited market diversification. Data reveals the disproportionate contribution of specific industries to total exports and the underutilization of trade potential with neighboring countries, indicating the need for export diversification.

"Pakistan's export sector, at \$31.55 billion, falls significantly below its potential of \$88.1 billion due to concentration in low-tech industries and limited trade diversification."

UNDP

VI. Savings-Investment Gap:

Pakistan grapples with a high consumption expenditure that diminishes savings, coupled with a stagnant investment-to-GDP ratio. Historical trends in household consumption and investment-to-GDP ratios underscore the urgency of addressing the savings-investment gap for sustained economic growth.

"Pakistan's consumption-oriented economy allocates a significant portion of income to consumption, leaving little for savings and investment."

Dr. Samuel Rizk | Resident Representative, UNDP Pakistan

VII. Global Competitiveness and Trade Integration:

Limited participation in global value chains and underutilization of trade potential pose challenges for Pakistan's global competitiveness. Examining the percentage of exports involved in global value chains and trade potential versus actual figures emphasizes the need for strategies to integrate into global trade more effectively.

VIII. Inflation Dynamics:

Persistently high inflation rates impact consumer prices and pose challenges in implementing effective control measures. Analyzing inflation rate trends and Consumer Price Index (CPI) fluctuations provides insights into the dynamics of inflation and the need for robust policies to manage price stability.

According to a World Bank report on inflation and development in Pakistan, food-related shortages and transportation challenges caused by the floods and the

war in Ukraine that impacted essential grain imports significantly contributed to the inflation.

IX. Unemployment and Social Unrest:

Rising unemployment rates contribute to social challenges and the potential for unrest. Examining unemployment rates across demographics highlights the need for immediate strategies to curb joblessness and mitigate social tensions.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF ECONOMIC MELTDOWN:

I. Rising Unemployment:

Economic meltdowns result in businesses facing financial difficulties, leading to downsizing and a reluctance to hire new employees. This creates a surge in unemployment rates as individuals struggle to find or retain jobs, exacerbating financial challenges for both workers and their families.

II. Soaring Unemployment Rates:

The economic meltdown in Pakistan has given rise to alarming levels of unemployment, especially among the youth. As businesses face financial constraints and contraction, they often implement workforce reductions to navigate economic uncertainties. The consequence is a significant segment of the population facing joblessness, leading to social unrest and discontent. The data reveals a sharp increase in unemployment rates, reaching at 5.6%, as of Oct 2023.

III. Deepening Poverty Levels:

Prolonged economic challenges have exacerbated poverty levels across Pakistan. The economic meltdown directly impacts the purchasing power of citizens, making it increasingly difficult for households to afford basic necessities. As a result, a substantial portion of the population faces heightened financial vulnerability, struggling to meet even fundamental requirements. Recent statistics indicate that the poverty headcount is estimated to have reached 39.4% in FY23, with 12.5 million more Pakistanis falling below the Lower-Middle Income Country poverty threshold (US\$3.65/day 2017 PPP per capita) relative to 34.2% in FY22.

IV. Reduced Investments and Business Growth:

Economic uncertainties and instability have created a climate of reduced investments and hindered business growth in Pakistan. Investors, both domestic and international, exhibit caution and reluctance due to the unpredictable economic environment. This reduction in investment adversely affects overall economic activity and the development of businesses.

V. Risk of Debt Defaults:

The economic meltdown elevates the risk of debt defaults, impacting Pakistan's creditworthiness on the global stage. As economic indicators weaken, the ability to meet

debt obligations becomes increasingly precarious. This not only affects the country's standing with international financial institutions but also poses challenges in securing favorable terms for future loans. The current debt and liabilities surpassed Rs. 51 trillion.

VI. Strain on Social Services and Welfare Programs:

The economic downturn places immense strain on social services and welfare programs in Pakistan. Government budgets are stretched thin as they struggle to allocate sufficient funds to address the growing demand for social assistance amid economic hardships. This strain is evident in the reduced funding for education and healthcare, and has resulted in a decrease in allocations for social services.

VII. Erosion of Purchasing Power:

Inflationary pressures associated with the economic meltdown have eroded the purchasing power of the general population in Pakistan. The cost of essential goods and services has surged, outpacing income growth. This has led to a decline in the standard of living, with citizens experiencing a tangible reduction in their ability to afford basic necessities.

VIII. Political and Social Unrest:

Economic challenges have become a catalyst for political and social unrest in Pakistan. Dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the economic crisis has manifested in protests and demonstrations. The unrest poses challenges to political stability and social cohesion. Instances of protests have surged in recent times, reflecting the heightened discontent among the population.

IX. Impact on Education and Healthcare:

The economic meltdown has placed significant strain on the education and healthcare sectors in Pakistan. Budget constraints, resulting from economic challenges, have translated into reduced funding for essential services. This impact is evident in decreased resources for schools and hospitals, negatively affecting the quality and accessibility of education and healthcare for the population.

4. WAY FORWARD- A ROADMAP FOR PAKISTAN'S RESILIENT FUTURE

Addressing economic challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving multiple stakeholders and policy interventions. Here are potential solutions to mitigate the consequences of the economic problems of Pakistan:

I. Job Creation and Skill Development:

Implementing policies to stimulate job creation, especially in sectors with growth potential, is crucial. Concurrently, investing in skill development programs that align

with the evolving demands of the job market can enhance employability and reduce unemployment.

II. Social Welfare Programs:

Strengthening and expanding social welfare programs can provide a safety net for vulnerable populations affected by economic downturns. Targeted assistance in the form of unemployment benefits, food subsidies, and healthcare support can help alleviate poverty.

III. Investment in Education:

Long-term economic stability relies on a well-educated and skilled workforce therefore, Pakistan should Increase investment in education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. It can contribute to innovation, productivity, and global competitiveness.

IV. Energy Sector Reforms:

Addressing challenges in the energy sector of Pakistan is vital for industrial growth. Reforms to improve energy efficiency, invest in renewable energy sources, and ensure a reliable power supply can boost productivity and reduce production costs.

V. Inclusive Governance and Anti-Corruption Measures:

Fostering inclusive governance, coupled with effective anti-corruption measures, creates an environment conducive to sustainable economic development. Transparency, accountability, and fair governance practices build trust and attract investments.

VI. Government Economic Stimulus:

Implementing well-designed economic stimulus packages can inject funds into the economy, supporting businesses and individuals. Infrastructure projects, tax incentives, and targeted subsidies can encourage economic growth and job creation.

VII. Debt Management and Fiscal Discipline:

Effective debt management strategies, including transparent borrowing practices and disciplined fiscal policies, are essential. Governments should prioritize spending on projects that yield long-term economic benefits and adopt measures to control budget deficits.

VIII. Diversification of the Economy:

Overreliance on specific industries is magnifying the impact of economic downturns. Promoting economic diversification by supporting emerging sectors and encouraging innovation can enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

IX. International Collaboration and Trade Agreements:

Strengthening international collaborations and trade agreements can open new avenues for economic growth. Expanding export markets, participating in global value chains, and fostering diplomatic relationships can enhance economic stability.

X. Financial Market Regulations:

Enhancing regulations and oversight in financial markets is crucial to prevent excessive risk-taking and speculative activities. Transparent and well-monitored financial systems contribute to market stability and investor confidence.

B. STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO TRADE DEVELOPMENT

1. HISTORICAL TRADE PERFORMANCE OF PAKISTAN

I. Decline in Export Contribution to GDP

Over time, Pakistan's export contribution to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has decreased significantly, from 16% to 10%. This decline is evident in the manufacturing sector, which now produces and exports 150 fewer products compared to the 1990s. Consequently, Pakistan's share in global trade has dwindled from 2% to a mere 1%.

II. Comparative Regional Export Performance

Comparing Pakistan's export performance with regional countries reveals stark contrasts. While South Asia's total exports of goods and services surged by 165% between 2005 and 2017, Thailand's and Vietnam's exports witnessed substantial growth at 519% and 50%, respectively. In contrast, Pakistan's exports grew only by 50%, reaching USD 28.7 billion from USD 19.1 billion.

III. Concerns about Global Trade Market and Trade Imbalance

Pakistan's diminishing share in the global export market poses significant challenges. Imports continue to rise, contributing to a substantial trade deficit. The declining exports coupled with the increasing reliance on imports aggravate the trade balance, leading to a widening trade deficit for the country.

2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO PAKISTAN'S TRADE DEFICIT

I. Increasing Reliance on Imports:

Import-led Growth Model: Pakistan's economic growth heavily relies on imports. This model, where economic expansion is driven by an increase in imported goods and services, contributes significantly to the widening trade deficit. As the demand for imports rises, it surpasses the growth in export revenues, leading to an imbalance in trade.

II. Characteristics of Export Goods:

Low-Income Elasticity, High Price Elasticity: The characteristics of goods exported by Pakistan pose challenges. The term "low-income elasticity" implies that the demand for these goods doesn't increase proportionately with economic growth. Additionally, the goods exhibit "high price elasticity," meaning that an increase in their prices leads to a substantial decline in demand globally, impacting export revenues.

III. Limited Export Basket:

Narrow Range of Exported Goods: Pakistan's export basket is narrow, particularly in key sectors such as textiles and manufacturing. The limited range of products exported inhibits the country's ability to capitalize on diverse market opportunities, restricting potential revenue streams.

IV. Static Export Markets:

Concentration in Few Markets: Pakistan's heavy reliance on a select few export markets, such as the US, China, UK, and Germany, creates a vulnerability to market fluctuations and limits opportunities for diversification. A broader and more diverse set of export destinations could mitigate risks.

V. Lack of Regional Trade:

Limited Regional Trade: The negligible engagement in regional trade within South Asia, which constitutes only 5% of the total trade, signifies a missed opportunity to leverage proximity and cultural affinities with neighboring countries. Enhancing regional trade relationships could open up new avenues for economic growth.

VI. Low Productivity:

Competitiveness and Output Challenges: The low productivity of Pakistan's industries hampers their competitiveness globally and regionally. Insufficient output per unit of input in manufacturing and agriculture reduces the country's ability to export finished goods profitably.

VII. Non-Integration in Global Supply Chains:

Limited Participation in Global Value Chains (GVCs): Falling behind in the integration with global value chains (GVCs), compared to regional counterparts, implies missed opportunities for increased economic collaboration, technological transfer, and access to larger consumer markets.

VIII. High Cost of Doing Business:

Elevated Operational Costs: The high energy and import tariffs, especially on raw materials, increase the overall cost of doing business in Pakistan. This elevated cost

structure diminishes the competitiveness of Pakistani products in the global market, leading to reduced export viability. Moreover, the average effective tariff rates being among the highest in the region add to the challenges faced by businesses

3. IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES

I. Economic Impact:

Reduced export contribution to GDP hampers overall economic growth and stability. Trade deficits strain the country's economic standing and external financial position.

II. Competitiveness Challenges:

Lack of diversification and limited export product range diminish Pakistan's competitive edge.

Failure to match regional peers' export growth implies underlying structural and policy challenges.

III. Trade Imbalance Risks:

Overreliance on imports widens the trade deficit, impacting currency valuation and economic stability.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATION TO BOOST TRADE & EXPORTS:

I. Trade as a Centerpiece:

Advocate for trade to be a central focus of the national development strategy, emphasizing its role in economic growth, job creation, and fostering global economic relations.

II. Tariff Rationalization:

Conduct a comprehensive review and rationalization of tariff slabs, especially for raw materials and intermediary goods, to enhance competitiveness and reduce production costs.

III. Investment in Agriculture and Research and Development:

Allocate resources to research and development in the agriculture sector to improve yields and reduce dependency on imports, addressing specific challenges like wheat production shortfalls.

IV. Addressing Dollarization:

Engage in currency swap agreements to mitigate the impact of dollarization, facilitating transactions in local currencies and reducing reliance on the US dollar in trade agreements.

V. Strategic Use:

Strategically leverage and understand rules of origin, taking inspiration from successful models like Bangladesh, which effectively utilized rules of origin for tariff-free market access.

VI. Trade Facilitation:

Implement a 'Business-to-Business Barter Mechanism' for selected products, especially in countries with limited banking channels, to facilitate trade and overcome obstacles.

VII. Re-evaluation of Export Support Policies:

Terminate existing policies favoring larger exporters and shift towards supporting smaller exporters through information dissemination. Establish trade information portals to educate exporters about procedures and processes.

VIII. Focus on Adding Value:

Emphasize the creation of backward linkages, encouraging the addition of value within the country before exporting. Promote practices that increase foreign value-added content in exports.

IX. Employ Economic Diplomacy:

Utilize economic diplomacy tools to penetrate new export markets, fostering diplomatic relations that support trade and economic growth.

X. Human Resource Development Ministry:

Establish a Ministry of Human Resource Development to focus on skill development and capacity building, ensuring the workforce is equipped for the demands of evolving industries.

C. PROBLEMS IN PAKISTAN'S VALUE ADDED TAX SYSTEM

1. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES:

I. Deficiencies in the VAT System in Pakistan

The Value Added Tax (VAT) system in Pakistan faces several challenges that hinder its smooth operation and effectiveness. One significant issue is the distortion caused by the addition of input taxes to prices, creating a scenario where businesses are unable to adjust certain input taxes with their output taxes. This results in an inflationary impact on prices, leading to double taxation and market distortions. Additionally, the extensive use of exemptions, particularly outlined in the Sixth Schedule of the Sales Tax Act 1990, contributes to what is known as 'exemption creep.' This phenomenon triggers a cascade effect throughout the production chain, causing further complexities in the VAT system.

II. VAT Deterring Capital Investment

The VAT system in Pakistan presents obstacles to capital investment, particularly in the case of tangible assets essential for production. The substantial amount of input tax paid on capital goods, such as machinery and equipment, poses a challenge as the recovery of this input tax is delayed. This delay is exacerbated by the government's reluctance to promptly reimburse input taxes, discouraging businesses, especially smaller enterprises, from investing in crucial assets. The resulting impact is a restriction on expansion, hindering overall economic activity and limiting employment opportunities.

III. Fraudulent Behaviors in Relation to VAT

Fraudulent activities within the VAT framework in Pakistan are a pressing concern, with systemic issues fostering non-compliance and deceptive practices. The use of a lower threshold for VAT creates a disadvantage for compliant taxpayers, as businesses showing lower income are granted exemptions. This not only distorts competition but also encourages businesses to register under incorrect categories to evade taxes. The inefficiencies in the refund system, coupled with reports of fake invoices, contribute to a problematic environment, particularly in the export sector, where manufacturers may exploit loopholes for financial gain.

IV. Inter-Provincial and Federal-Provincial Disputes

The complex interplay between provincial and federal jurisdictions in taxation under the Sales Tax Act 1990 leads to disputes and challenges in tax collection. Ambiguities arise in cases like toll manufacturing, where it becomes unclear whether the payment is for goods or services. Additionally, determining the tax jurisdiction for services, especially in scenarios like TV advertisements, adds further complications. These legal uncertainties significantly impede the smooth functioning of tax collection in Pakistan.

V. Administrative Issues

The administration of the VAT system in Pakistan faces multiple challenges, impacting its efficiency and compliance. Audit processes, a critical component of tax administration, grapple with issues such as unclear coverage, case selection, and methodology. This is compounded by a lack of skilled officials, potential collusion, weak political commitment, and an absence of a clear legal framework defining the rights of taxpayers. Moreover, low tax compliance rates, stemming from insufficient infrastructure and training, further hinder the effectiveness of the VAT system. Inadequate digitalization, including a lack of investment in digital infrastructure and tax education, exacerbates compliance costs, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, posing a significant obstacle to the stability of the system. Addressing these administrative challenges requires comprehensive reforms to strengthen auditing processes, enhance compliance, and invest in modern digital infrastructure and tax education initiatives.

2. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE VAT SYSTEM IN PAKISTAN

I. Establishment of National Tax Authority (NTA)

- The creation of a National Tax Authority (NTA) is proposed to serve as the exclusive tax collector at both the provincial and federal levels. The NTA, inspired by the Canadian concept of 'participating provinces' under the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) system, will harmonize tax collection and enhance coordination between different tiers of government.
- The NTA's role will be strictly limited to tax collection, with no involvement in legislation. It will be accountable to Parliament through the Minister of Finance and Revenue and overseen by an independent Board of Management, featuring representation from all provinces.
- The Council of Common Interest and the National Economic Council will play key roles in the establishment and control of the NTA, respectively.

II. Tax Intelligence System (TIS) Support for NTA

- The NTA will be supported by a Tax Intelligence System (TIS) responsible for sending notices to potential taxpayers. This system will provide taxpayers with an estimate of the department's expectations regarding their returns.
- Integration between sales tax collections on goods and services, income tax returns, and property taxes is proposed to enhance the efficiency of the TIS.

III. Addressing Exemption Creep

- To tackle the issue of exemption creep, it is recommended that exemptions be applied only at the final stage of consumption. This approach eliminates cascading and ensures that the ultimate consumer benefits from the exemptions.

IV. Mechanism for Eliminating Double Taxation

- A specific mechanism, formulated in consultation with businessmen, is proposed to eliminate double taxation arising from the purchase of items such as cars for business purposes. This mechanism should establish a policy to pro-rate input taxes on items not directly linked to business activities.

V. Exemption or Zero Rating for Capital Goods

- To expedite business activity and encourage investment, it is suggested that capital goods be either exempted or zero-rated. This would reduce the time lag in recovering input tax and stimulate increased investment.

VI. Preventing Input Tax Frauds

- A focused approach to preventing input tax fraud involves narrowing the scope of refunds for input tax. This can be achieved by restricting refunds to exporters and discontinuing zero-rating on domestic supplies, especially in sectors prone to high fraud, such as textiles.

VII. Enhancing Efficiency of the Audit System

- The efficiency of the VAT system hinges on an effective audit system. Comprehensive and institutional methods, including simultaneous reviews of income tax, wealth statements, and VAT returns, are suggested. Unannounced visits, scrutiny of records, and thorough audits in cases of serious misreporting are emphasized.

VIII. Setting a Higher Threshold for Exemption

- To address market inefficiencies, it is recommended to establish a higher threshold for exemption in Pakistan. This adjustment aims to streamline the exemption process and enhance the overall efficiency of the VAT system.

5. CONCLUSION

To cut the story short, Pakistan stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a multifaceted economic crisis that demands immediate attention and strategic interventions. The analysis of the current economic meltdown revealed a confluence of challenges, including fiscal deficits, agricultural stagnation, industrial hurdles, and trade imbalances, all contributing to a heightened risk of default. The consequences of this crisis are far-reaching, manifesting in rising unemployment, deepening poverty, reduced investments, and the erosion of purchasing power, further exacerbated by social and political unrest. However, charting a course for economic resilience involves a comprehensive roadmap that encompasses job creation, social welfare programs, education investments, energy sector reforms, inclusive governance, economic stimulus, and debt management. Additionally, addressing structural impediments to trade development and reforming the VAT system are imperative. The suggested policy recommendations, from tariff rationalization to establishing a National Tax Authority and enhancing the efficiency of the audit system, present a holistic approach to revitalize Pakistan's economy. By embracing these measures, Pakistan can navigate the current challenges, foster sustainable economic growth, and pave the way for a resilient and prosperous future.

THE AFGHAN REFUGEE DEPORTATION DILEMMA

Navigating the Complexities of Pakistan's Repatriation Policy for Afghan Refugees

Synopsis:

1. Introduction
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THE AFGHAN REFUGEE DEPORTATION DILEMMA

Navigating the Complexities of Pakistan's Repatriation Policy for Afghan Refugees

1. INTRODUCTION

Exploring the multifaceted dynamics surrounding the deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan, this context spans over 40 years, initially grounded in Islamic solidarity rather than international refugee conventions. Despite Pakistan's historical role as a host and the significant repatriation efforts in 2002, the recent withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan has created reluctance among Afghan refugees due to their affiliations. The government's decision to deport unauthorized immigrants, with phases of voluntary and coercive repatriation, is framed as a measure to counter terrorism. This prompts an examination of Pakistan's moral and legal position in deporting Afghan refugees and the asserted connection between mass migration and the mitigation of terrorism.

2. CURRENT REPATRIATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES:

On 3 October, Pakistan's National Apex Committee endorsed a plan to repatriate over a million foreigners without valid documents, largely Afghans, requiring them to leave the country by 1 November. Since 15 September, some 493,300 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan. In January over 20 deportations have been registered, compared to some 3,500 in December, 24,500 deportations in November and 960 in October. Most movements took place through Torkham and Spin Boldak-Chaman official borders, although Badini, Ghulam Khan and Bahramcha are also being used. As of 31 December, over 30,600 individuals have been arrested/detained in 2023. This represents a over nine-fold increase in arrests/detentions as compared to the 2023 total as of the end of October. (UNHCR)

According to the UN high commissioner for refugees (UNHCR), there are almost four million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan, 700,000 of whom fled after the Taliban regained power more than two years ago. About 1.7 million are deemed to be in Pakistan illegally, with little legal protection or means to get asylum.

3. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN

The phenomenon of refugee deportations tends to occur globally when regions experiencing mass exodus stabilize. The expulsion of Afghan refugees, witnessed in countries like Pakistan and Iran, has attracted international attention, particularly in response to the Pakistan caretaker government's new domestic law on illegal immigrants. The international community and the Afghan government express concerns rooted in the peace, security, and humanitarian conditions within Afghanistan. Notably, organizations

such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) have consistently advocated for the well-being of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, offering assistance during critical periods. Pakistan classifies Afghan refugees into recognized and unrecognized categories, the latter being labeled as illegal immigrants. This classification becomes crucial in formulating rights, determining access to restrictions, protection, and other essential services, providing recognized refugees advantages over their unrecognized counterparts. *The four identified classes of Afghan refugees include* Proof of Registration (PoR) holders, Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, Afghan nationals with valid visas, and undocumented illegal immigrants.

The historical evolution of Afghan refugees in Pakistan spans several tumultuous decades, marked by displacement and suffering resulting from prolonged war, violence, internal power struggles, and foreign interventions, including those from the UK and the US in Afghanistan. Adverse weather conditions, such as severe drought, further intensified the refugee crisis. By 1989, the cumulative impact of these factors led to a staggering 6.2 million refugees. Hosting such a substantial refugee population inevitably posed administrative, social, economic, and security challenges for Pakistan. The country, grappling with poverty and economic constraints, found it increasingly difficult to accommodate refugees perceived as potential national and security threats. Post-1999, new refugees were labeled as illegal immigrants rather than recognized as refugees, reflecting a shift in policy. Despite an initially open-door policy by Zia ul Haq, social issues between Afghan refugees and Pakistanis emerged, though considered insignificant at the time.

Pakistan played a significant role in hosting initially destitute and illiterate Afghan refugees, providing them with job opportunities and a higher quality of life than in Afghanistan. The displacement of Afghan refugees occurred in three waves: the Soviet Union era, the post-9/11 era following the fall of the Taliban government, and a wave of economic migrants seeking better opportunities. The voluntary deportation of refugees to Afghanistan after the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989, facilitated by UNHCR repatriation programs, did not prevent a subsequent influx due to political turmoil.

The mid-1990s witnessed a change in Pakistan's attitude towards Afghan refugees, influenced by a reduction in international subsidies and subsequent cuts in UNHCR support. With a fragile economy and diminished foreign funding, a competition for resources, including jobs, education, and healthcare, ensued between refugees and Pakistani citizens. This competition escalated, leading Afghan refugees to leave camps and settle in urban areas, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, triggering tensions and intolerance within the local population. Over time, these challenges intensified due to the scarcity of resources, further fueling discord between Afghan refugees and Pakistani citizens.

"Since the Taliban's return, around 600,000 Afghans made their way into Pakistan, swelling the number of Afghan refugees in the country to an estimated 3.7 million, with 1.32 million registered with the U.N. High Commission on Refugees."
 (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/13/pakistan-afghanistan-taliban-refugees-deportation/>)

4. INSECURITIES IN PAKISTAN

The influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan has generated profound insecurities across various aspects of the nation's life. The strained bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, exacerbated by a decline in foreign assistance post the US troop withdrawal, loom large. This substantial refugee population poses both a domestic threat to Pakistan's already fragmented economy and heightens security concerns due to the illicit transportation of trade and arms from Afghanistan. Economic insecurities have emerged as Afghan traders, exempt from taxes, accumulate substantial wealth, impacting local taxpayers and diminishing revenue collection. In cities like Peshawar, Afghan refugees involved in the Afghan-Soviet conflict received vocational training based on jihad principles, fostering bigotry and fanaticism among them and contributing to increased intolerance within Pakistani society.

Furthermore, accusations of Afghan refugees' direct or indirect involvement in criminal activities and terrorism have intensified insecurities. The outlawed behavior of some refugees, including kidnappings, abductions for ransom, and their association with insurgent groups, has been linked to events of terrorism. The government of Pakistan has pointed out their involvement in criminal acts, and their proximity to the Afghanistan border has facilitated suspicions of logistical backing and armed support during conflicts, fostering uncertainty in the hosting country. The drug culture introduced by Afghan refugees, particularly during the Soviet Union and Afghanistan war, has led to the cultivation of poppy opium and a subsequent expansion of the drug trade within Pakistan, infiltrating educational institutions and posing a significant threat to the nation's future. The multifaceted insecurities stemming from the Afghan refugee crisis highlight the complex challenges faced by Pakistan.

5. WHAT IS PAKISTAN'S DEPORTATION POLICY?

Pakistan's deportation policy, effective from November 1, 2023, targets all "unregistered foreigners," primarily impacting over 4 million Afghan citizens, with an estimated 1.7 million being undocumented and having resided in Pakistan for decades since fleeing the Soviet Union's occupation in the 1980s. To enforce this policy, the government hastily established forty-nine new deportation centers, raising concerns about grim conditions. Approximately 15,000 Afghans are crossing the border daily, and around 450,000 have already left. Despite assurances that legal Afghan residents won't be expelled, reports suggest some with proper documentation have been targeted, prompting preemptive departures. Amid this, the Supreme Court has initiated hearings challenging the policy, highlighting its contentious nature and sparking legal debates about its

compliance with national and international laws. The situation reflects the challenges faced by affected communities and the legal system in navigating the implications of this deportation policy.

6. REASONS BEHIND REPATRIATION / WHY IS PAKISTAN DEPORTING MIGRANTS?

I. Security Concerns and Counterterrorism Objectives:

Pakistan's decision to deport migrants, primarily Afghan nationals, is explicitly framed within a counterterrorism narrative. The disputed Pakistan-Afghanistan border, known as the "Durand Line," has been a historic haven for extremist groups, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (Pakistani Taliban) and the Islamic State in Khorasan. Pakistani officials attribute a notable increase in high-profile terrorist attacks to Afghan nationals, placing the blame on Afghanistan's Taliban-led government for harboring militants. In November 2023, interim Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar stated that a significant portion of those involved in criminal and terrorist activities are among these illegal immigrants.

II. Potential Leverage on the Taliban and Ethnic Dynamics:

Analysts offer varied perspectives on Pakistan's motivations, with some suggesting a strategy to pressure the Taliban government to take terrorism more seriously. Others point to a potential desire to reduce the population of ethnic Pashtuns, a substantial minority to which many Afghan migrants belong, and whom Pakistan's influential military perceives as a separatist threat. The deportation policy is seen as a multifaceted approach, addressing security concerns while potentially influencing internal dynamics in Afghanistan and Pakistan's ethnic composition.

III. Historical Precedent and Migration Crackdown:

This isn't the first instance of Pakistan citing security concerns in a migration crackdown. In 2016, Pakistan deported around six hundred thousand Afghan migrants, a move criticized by Human Rights Watch as "the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times." Following this, Pakistan initiated the construction of a fence along the Durand Line as part of efforts to secure the border and manage migration flows. The historical precedent underscores the persistence of security-driven migration policies and their significant consequences for the affected populations and international observers.

"This is not the first time Pakistan has cited security concerns in a migration crackdown in 2016, it deported some six hundred thousand Afghan migrants. Human Rights Watch called the exodus 'the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times.' Soon thereafter, Pakistan began building a fence along the Durand Line."

(Megan Fahrney - Council on Foreign Relations (cfr.com) - December 15, 2023)

7. ENDEAVORS FOR REPATRIATION IN THE PAST:

I. Persistent Commitment to Refugee Repatriation:

Pakistan's enduring dedication to facilitating the return and enhancing the living conditions of Afghan refugees remains consistent over the years. Seeking international assistance, Pakistan aims to create conducive circumstances and economic opportunities in Afghanistan to encourage the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees.

II. Collaborative Efforts with Afghan Government:

Past initiatives witnessed joint endeavors between Pakistan and Afghanistan, exemplified by programs like the Afghan citizens' card project. Despite not being a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, Pakistan provided Afghan refugees with temporary residence cards, later upgraded to Biometric Identity cards in May 2021, affording essential rights within Pakistan.

III. National Policy on Refugee Solutions:

Pakistan adopted a comprehensive National Policy on Afghan Refugees, aligning its approach with the multiyear Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). Prioritizing voluntary repatriation, this policy emphasizes safeguarding the dignity of Afghan refugees and explores viable resettlement arrangements in Afghanistan.

IV. Historical Patterns in Repatriation Decisions:

Beyond the current emphasis on repatriation, Pakistan has a history of similar announcements. The past includes instances like the forced eviction in 2016, expelling a substantial refugee population, criticized globally as the world's largest illegal mass exodus by Human Rights Watch (HRW). These historical events shed light on the complexities of managing refugee populations and executing repatriation plans.

8. ROLE OF UNHCR IN REFUGEE ASSISTANCE:

During the mass influx of Afghan refugees to Pakistan, the UNHCR wasn't actively operational in the country. However, after Islamabad realized the severity of the refugee crisis, it formally requested the UNHCR's assistance in April 1979. The UNHCR established its office in Islamabad in October 1979, extending aid worth 15 million dollars to assist the refugees. The UNHCR played a pivotal role in providing essential services and protection to refugees, including education and healthcare, significantly impacting their livelihoods. Despite international aid, migrations had detrimental effects on Pakistani society, leading to challenges and tensions.

I. Afghanistan's Current Situation and Human Rights Concerns:

The present circumstances in Afghanistan aren't conducive for the voluntary repatriation of refugees as outlined in the UNHCR's 1996 guidelines. After the Taliban

regained power in August 2021, restrictions were imposed on girls' education, women's participation in universities, and other activities, posing risks, especially for women and girls. This restricted environment and curtailed rights demonstrate the challenges and dangers refugees may face upon returning to Afghanistan.

II. International and National Laws Impacting Refugees in Pakistan:

Despite Pakistan not being a party to the 1951 convention, customary international law restricts forced repatriation. This convention, considered customary law, binds nations irrespective of their membership status. Pakistan is obligated to respect these principles, but the Taliban regime's uncertain protection of refugees raises concerns about potential humanitarian crises. Similarly, international declarations emphasize the rights of refugees to security, shelter, education, and religious freedom, urging Pakistan to adopt empathetic strategies to meet refugees' needs.

III. Foreigners Acts and Orders in Pakistan:

The Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Foreigners Order of 1951 govern foreigner-related matters in Pakistan but fail to exempt refugee status. These laws subject refugees, including those seeking sanctuary, to arrest, imprisonment, and repatriation, heightening their vulnerability to mistreatment. Only those possessing refugee cards were spared through a 1997 policy. Amendments in 2001 differentiated between refugees and other foreigners present in Pakistan, altering the legal landscape for refugees in the country.

IV. Tripartite Agreement and Repatriation Efforts:

Pakistan inked a Tripartite Agreement with Afghanistan and the UNHCR in 2003, facilitating the voluntary return of documented Afghan refugees for three-year terms, extended periodically until 2012. The UNHCR played a leading role in catalyzing and overseeing the repatriation process under this agreement.

9. WHAT HAVE THE INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS BEEN?

The international reactions to Pakistan's deportation of Afghan refugees have been critical, drawing concern from entities such as the United Nations, the United States, and various human rights organizations. These entities have called on Islamabad to cease deportations and uphold international obligations regarding the proper treatment of refugees. Despite Pakistan not ratifying the 1951 Geneva Convention and lacking domestic protections for refugees, legal analysts argue that the deportations violate international human rights norms, specifically against returning asylum seekers to a perilous or oppressive situation. Rights advocates emphasize that Afghanistan meets the criteria for such a situation, especially considering the deteriorating humanitarian conditions since the Taliban's takeover in 2021, heightening the threat faced by refugees being deported back to Afghanistan.

U.S. officials have taken steps to address the situation, indicating plans to pursue U.S. visas for at least twenty-five thousand Afghans deemed particularly at risk. This group includes wartime allies, journalists, and women's rights activists. The deportations have also strained Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, which has condemned the policy. The financial strain resulting from the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees could complicate aid efforts, especially given the ongoing Western sanctions on the Taliban. Afghanistan has appealed for increased international assistance, citing a similar push by Iran to expel its Afghan population; however, donor hesitation persists. Some analysts caution that Islamabad's strategy to reduce terrorist attacks through deportations might backfire, potentially fueling grievances and diminishing Kabul's willingness to cooperate. The international response underscores the complex geopolitical and humanitarian implications of Pakistan's deportation policy.

10. HOW ARE THE TALIBAN REACTING?

*"Pakistan's decision to expel refugees violated international laws.
"You [Pakistan] are a neighbour, you should think about the future."*

(Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund - Afghanistan's interim Prime Minister)

The Taliban has expressed concern over Pakistan's deportation of Afghan refugees, citing ill-preparedness to receive a large number of returnees amid Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis. The Taliban government has urged Pakistan to refrain from forcibly deporting Afghans without adequate preparation, emphasizing the harsh winter conditions exacerbating the plight of returnees. Criticism has been directed at Pakistan's decision to confiscate cash and belongings from returnees. In response, the Taliban appointed a commission to manage mass returns, establishing temporary camps and providing basic necessities. The government has also initiated efforts to issue national identity cards for returnees and sought international assistance through diplomatic channels. However, dwindling aid budgets and ongoing concerns about the Taliban's rights restrictions pose challenges to addressing the humanitarian impact of mass deportations. Despite the Taliban's crackdown on individuals suspected of assisting the TTP, it is unlikely to alleviate Pakistan's security concerns or prompt a reversal of the deportation policy. Public support for the repatriation policy in Pakistan remains, while local rights groups and politicians call for its reconsideration, with some filing petitions to the Supreme Court against forced deportations.

"This is injustice, an injustice that cannot be ignored in any way. The forced expulsion of people is in conflict with all the norms of good neighbourliness,...."

In the long term, there may be many negative effects on the relations and communications between the two countries."

(Bilal Karimi, Spokesperson for the Afghan Government - Al Jazeera)

11. IMPACTS OF THIS POLICY SHIFT:

The sudden crackdown on illegal immigrants by Pakistan has raised concerns about its potential impact on the country's political landscape and economy. While some officials downplay the economic consequences, business leaders in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa fear the move could further strain their fragile economies, heavily dependent on cheap labor provided by undocumented immigrants, predominantly Afghans. The decision, linked to security and counter-terrorism measures, faced opposition from politicians, rights activists, and international bodies, including Amnesty International and the UN Commissioner for Refugees. The government asserts that the departure of undocumented illegal Afghans, who reportedly make no significant economic contribution, will not adversely affect the economy. However, critics argue that the decision lacks consideration of economic repercussions and may disproportionately impact vulnerable Afghan communities engaged in various informal sectors. There is discontent among business leaders who feel excluded from decision-making forums on this matter, emphasizing the need for a more holistic and economically informed approach.

"As Pakistan deports refugees, tense Afghanistan ties come in sharp focus. Pakistan says most Afghans have left voluntarily, a claim rejected by Kabul which calls the Pakistani action 'unilateral' and 'humiliating'."

(<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/7/as-pakistan-deports-refugees-tense-afghanistan-ties-come-in-sharp-focus>)

Pakistan's forced repatriation of Afghan refugees risks causing a humanitarian crisis, straining both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The logistical challenges are evident, with returnees enduring harsh conditions and lengthy waiting times at border crossings. The abrupt deportation, coupled with restrictions on carrying money and property, plunges many into poverty. Afghanistan's struggling economy, compounded by existing challenges, may struggle to accommodate the influx, potentially leading to widespread unemployment and societal difficulties. Vulnerable groups, including those who fled after the Taliban's takeover, face uncertain futures, with potential security risks as returnees may resort to criminality or opposition to the Taliban. The situation could also fuel increased migration, raising concerns globally, particularly in Europe and along established migrant routes.

12. THE WAY FORWARD - WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Pakistan's repatriation policy poses risks to international peace, infringing on humanitarian principles and raising concerns under international law. The principle of non-refoulement, even if not explicitly binding on Pakistan, should be applied to prevent the return of those facing persecution, particularly vulnerable groups fearing Taliban rule. Legal challenges within Pakistan highlight the policy's contentious nature, with international actors urged to intervene. Foreign governments with influence, including the U.S. and EU states, should press Pakistan to cancel or revise the repatriation plan, ensuring compliance with legal and humanitarian norms. International donors should

support efforts to screen potential returnees, extending refugee status where necessary. Simultaneously, Western nations with resettlement programs should expedite the relocation of Afghan refugees identified as at risk.

Furthermore, the Taliban must facilitate the humane return of individuals, refraining from probing reasons for leaving Afghanistan. The international community should press the Taliban to honor protective duties, treating returnees with dignity, and respecting the proclaimed "general amnesty" for former opponents. Coordinated efforts between Pakistan, Afghanistan, UN agencies, and donor states are crucial to address the complex challenges associated with the forced repatriation and ensure the protection of vulnerable individuals.

Finally, The government of Pakistan should reassess its new policy on forced deportation of Afghan refugees and continue collaborating with the UNHCR to document unregistered refugees. This collaboration is crucial to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the government of Afghanistan should incentivize and facilitate the return of Afghan refugees with the support of the international community. Additionally, the Taliban regime ought to announce a general amnesty for refugees hesitant to return due to their ties with the US, ensuring protection from potential persecution.

13. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, the deportation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan presents a complex and multifaceted dilemma, intertwining historical, political, security, and humanitarian dimensions. The recent policy shift, driven by security concerns and counterterrorism objectives, has garnered international criticism, raising questions about its compliance with legal and humanitarian norms. The historical evolution of Afghan refugees in Pakistan reflects the intricate challenges faced by both nations, marked by periods of hospitality, strained relations, and policy shifts. The role of international actors, particularly the UNHCR, is pivotal in addressing the current crisis and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable individuals. The impacts of the deportation policy extend beyond national borders, affecting regional stability and posing potential humanitarian crises. Moving forward, a collaborative effort involving Pakistan, Afghanistan, UN agencies, and the international community is essential to navigate these complexities, ensuring the humane treatment and protection of Afghan refugees, while addressing the legitimate security concerns of the host country. The adherence to principles of non-refoulement and the pursuit of diplomatic solutions are imperative to mitigate the potential fallout and pave the way for a more just and compassionate resolution to this intricate situation.

NAVIGATING PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AN EVOLVING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

Synopsis:

1. **Introduction**
2. **Global Power Shift and Pakistan's foreign policy dilemma**
3. **Challenges to Pakistan's Foreign Policy in an ever-evolving global landscape:**
 - I. Strategic Neutrality and Regional Balancing Act
 - II. Middle East Dynamics and Regional Stability
 - III. Afghanistan's Unpredictability and Security Risks
 - IV. Security Concerns
 - V. Economic Stability
 - VI. Non-Traditional Threats
 - VII. U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Alignment Issues
 - VIII. Relations with India
 - IX. India-America Nexus
 - X. Rebuilding Ties with the USA
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4. **The way forward: Pakistan's Foreign Policy Course in a Multipolar World**
 - I. Balancing Great Power Relations through Strategic Neutrality and Balancing Act:
 - a. Russia's Resurgence and Pakistan's Response
 - b. Europe's Quest for Strategic Autonomy and Pakistan's Role
 - II. U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy: Balancing Alliances and National Interests
 - III. Seizing Regional Opportunities
 - IV. Stabilizing Afghanistan with Regional Support
 - V. Addressing Non-Traditional Threats
 - VI. Proactive Approach and Diplomatic Clarity
 - VII. Strengthening Diplomatic Missions
 - VIII. Civil-Military Coordination

IX. Managing Relations with India

X. Outreach Strategy and Multipolar Engagement

XI. Strategic Neutrality and Economic Integration: The Look East Policy

5. Conclusion

NAVIGATING PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AN EVOLVING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's foreign policy confronts a myriad of challenges that intricately weave together issues of security, regional conflicts, economic stability, and international perception. Since its inception, security considerations have been paramount, driving Pakistan's engagement with critical matters such as the Kashmir dispute, conflicts in Afghanistan, and the persistent threat of terrorism. These challenges not only influence the nation's domestic dynamics but also shape its interactions on the global stage. Furthermore, economic woes, including a high fiscal deficit and inflation, compound the complexities, emphasizing the integral link between economic stability and effective foreign policy. Balancing regional alliances, particularly with major powers like China and the US, adds another layer of intricacy, requiring deft diplomacy. Moreover, Pakistan grapples with the task of dispelling negative global perceptions, highlighting its efforts against human rights violations and religious militancy. In navigating this intricate landscape, Pakistan must fortify its institutions, engage in robust diplomatic endeavors, and rethink its foreign policy to project a positive image, protect national interests, and contribute to regional and global stability.

2. GLOBAL POWER SHIFT AND PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY DILEMMA

The global power dynamics are currently undergoing significant shifts. Traditional superpowers like the United States are facing challenges to their dominance, while emerging powers like China and resurgent powers like Russia are asserting themselves on the world stage. These shifts have profound implications for countries like Pakistan, which must adapt their foreign policy to navigate this evolving landscape.

"For countries, especially the developing one's, major power rivalry poses a challenge and an opportunity. For Pakistan, this scenario is not new. Nonetheless, with developing major regional and global alignments and India's close proximity to the US demands astute handling of foreign policy. With Pakistan's economy in deep distress relations with international monetary organisations, the IMF and World Bank, as recent experience reminds us, are equally important. Their attitude apart from other factors depends on

how we relate to the US and major powers. The great challenge for Pakistan however is how to steer and maintain good relations with the US while having a strong strategic and economic relationship with China. The US interest in Pakistan has lessened after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, but still prospects of trade and commerce and Pakistan's relations with India do evoke interest. "

(Talat Masood -Dawn -July 19, 2023)

3. CHALLENGES TO PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AN EVER-EVOLVING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE:

I. Strategic Neutrality and Regional Balancing Act:

Balancing relations with major powers, particularly the U.S. and China, requires strategic neutrality. While maintaining a close alliance with China, Pakistan needs to navigate the challenges arising from the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific strategy. Striking a balance between economic cooperation with China and addressing U.S. concerns is crucial for Pakistan's foreign policy to avoid entanglement in great power rivalries.

II. Middle East Dynamics and Regional Stability:

Instability in the Middle East, particularly the threat of conflict between Iran and the U.S., poses challenges for Pakistan's foreign policy. Managing relations with both Middle Eastern allies and Iran while strengthening socio-economic linkages is crucial. The potential spill-over effects of Middle East instability, such as refugee influx and proxy warfare, require a nuanced approach to maintain regional stability.

III. Afghanistan's Unpredictability and Security Risks:

The ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan obstructs Pakistan's regional plans and introduces security risks. The uncertainties post-U.S. withdrawal and the potential for Afghanistan becoming a breeding ground for adversarial activities pose challenges. Stabilizing Afghanistan, ensuring the legitimacy of the Taliban government, and securing support from China become imperative for mitigating security risks emanating from the region.

"The ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan has not only obstructed Pakistan pivoting to the energy and trade corridor but has also extremely affected stability in the border region. "

(Rizwana Abbasi| strategicstudies.org.pk)

IV. Security Concerns:

Pakistan grapples with serious security challenges, including domestic and cross-border terrorism, as well as conflicts with neighboring countries. These challenges not only impact domestic stability but also influence Pakistan's relations with the global community. Strengthening counter-terrorism efforts, intelligence capabilities, and active

engagement with regional and international partners are essential for addressing these concerns.

V. Economic Stability:

Pakistan is currently facing severe economic challenges, including a high fiscal deficit, balance of payment issues, and rampant inflation. Economic stability is crucial for effective foreign policy engagement. Implementing sound economic policies, attracting foreign investment, and promoting trade are essential steps to strengthen Pakistan's position in the international community.

VI. Non-Traditional Threats:

Pakistan faces non-traditional threats, including vulnerability to climate change and economic coercion through international mechanisms like the IMF and FATF. Crafting policies to address these vulnerabilities, aligning with sustainable development goals, and diversifying economic options beyond reliance on the U.S. dollarization and IMF are essential for resilience against non-traditional challenges.

According to the Global Climate Index, Pakistan is among the top ten countries likely to be most affected by the impact of climate change.

VII. U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Alignment Issues:

The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy poses a challenge for Pakistan due to its close alliance with China and cordial relations with the U.S. The perceived strategic partnership of CPEC and the designation of India as a net-security provider by the U.S. create pressure on Pakistan. The potential for increased U.S. pressure on issues ranging from Pakistan's nuclear program to human rights, along with facilitation of Indian access to advanced technologies, complicates Pakistan's foreign policy landscape.

VIII. Relations with India:

Geostrategic and geoeconomic considerations make relations with India a perennial challenge. Addressing Indian allegations of cross-border terrorism, dealing with issues like water terrorism and atrocities in Kashmir, while recognizing the potential for bilateral trade, poses a significant diplomatic dilemma for Pakistan. Initiating dialogue and countering Indian hostilities on international forums require nuanced approaches.

IX. India-America Nexus:

The collaboration between India and the USA, evident in economic and military agreements, poses another challenge for Pakistan's foreign policy. Agreements like BECA and the provision of drones to India require strategic responses. Effectively managing the dynamics between these two countries demands astute diplomatic efforts from Pakistan.

X. Rebuilding Ties with the USA:

Rebuilding relations with the USA post-Cypher controversy, the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and managing aspects like the CPEC and IMF conditions pose significant foreign policy challenges for Pakistan.

XI. Managing Relations with Iran:

Balancing relations with Iran is crucial for Pakistan's foreign policy, considering the ongoing competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Despite China's mediation, Pakistan needs to foster comprehensive approaches to engage with both states effectively.

XII. Countering Indian Hostilities:

Another critical litmus tests for Pakistan's foreign policy is addressing Indian hostilities, countering aggression in Kashmir, and initiating meaningful bilateral trade. Effectively tackling Indian brutalities requires strategic planning and diplomatic finesse.

XIII. Global negative Image Perception:

Pakistan often faces negative perceptions globally, impacting its foreign policy objectives. Efforts to combat human rights violations, religious militancy, and terrorism are not always acknowledged by the international community. Pakistan should actively work on improving its image through effective communication strategies, cultural diplomacy, and highlighting its contributions to global peace.

4. THE WAY FORWARD: PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY COURSE IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

I. Balancing Great Power Relations through Strategic Neutrality and Balancing Act:

A balanced approach is necessary in managing relations with major powers. Pakistan should actively pursue a foreign policy that engages with both the U.S. and China, safeguarding its national interests. Emphasizing dialogue and cooperation while avoiding alignment in great power rivalries will allow Pakistan to navigate the complexities of the evolving multipolar world.

Pakistan has to navigate the evolving multipolarity, cautiously assessing emerging challenges on a short and long-term basis while making tough decisions based on a balancing act thereby seeking guidance from national interests.

(Rizwana Abbasi | strategicstudies.org.pk)

Developing economic partnerships with multiple global players can help Pakistan reduce vulnerabilities stemming from power struggles.

"To develop relations with both China and the US, Pakistan's diplomacy needs to be flexible. China is a strategic partner but cannot be a substitute for other relations. The ties with China may be indispensable, but with America they are necessary. Pakistan also needs to review its ties with India. The old model has become unsustainable, supported neither by our own diminished national strength nor by our friends lured by the economic and strategic opportunities that India offers. And it is no help to Kashmiris either."

(Touqir Hussain - Dawn - April 9, 2023)

a. Russia's Resurgence and Pakistan's Response

Russia is actively pursuing a more assertive foreign policy in regions of interest, including the Middle East. Pakistan needs to consider its response to Russia's resurgence:

Balancing Act: Pakistan should engage with Russia while maintaining its historical ties with the United States. It needs to strike a balance between the two powers to ensure its national interests are protected.

Diversifying Alliances: Given Russia's increasing influence in the Middle East and Asia, Pakistan may explore opportunities for strategic cooperation with Russia in areas of mutual interest, such as energy and regional stability.

"Over the last decade, Pakistan and Russia bilateral relationship have commenced on the path of improvement, with both countries entering into multiple deals of cooperation in the domains of military, politics and economics.

It is high time that Pakistan and Russia realise and accept the realities of international relations, learn from their past and further build upon the positive developments to solidify their bilateral relations for mutual benefits and for the good of the entire region."

(Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan -Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Russia - Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad)

b. Europe's Quest for Strategic Autonomy and Pakistan's Role

Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy and its focus on diversifying value chains present opportunities for Pakistan:

Economic Cooperation: Pakistan can explore economic partnerships with European countries, seeking to diversify their value chains. Trade and investment agreements can enhance economic ties.

Energy and Climate: Collaboration with European nations on climate change initiatives can help Pakistan address its own climate-related challenges while strengthening diplomatic relations.

"The EU is one of Pakistan's largest trading partners and a significant source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Pakistan. The EU accounts for a substantial share of Pakistan's exports, particularly in the sectors of textiles and garments. The Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) provides Pakistan with preferential access to the EU market, and has contributed towards a substantial increase in trade between the two sides. Both Pakistan and EU have benefitted from the scheme, resulting in a win-win situation."

(Ministry Of Foreign Affairs, Government Of Pakistan)

II. U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy: Balancing Alliances and National Interests

The U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy presents a complex landscape for Pakistan, requiring a delicate balancing act between its close alliance with China and cordial relations with the U.S. Identifying challenges related to CPEC, India's role, and nuclear considerations, the foreign policy approach demands strategic finesse and a meticulous alignment with national interests.

"Pakistan finds itself at the horns of a strategic dilemma as the US-China rivalry intensifies in international politics. At the heart of the dilemma is the spectre of choosing between the United States (US) and China which has the intended effect of raising costs for Pakistan's foreign policy. Recent commentaries on Pakistan's foreign policy advocate the need for Pakistan to strike a balance between China and the US. In contradistinction to such commentaries, the present article makes a more nuanced case for the 'hedging' strategy. Hedging involves policies that advocate a mixture of return-maximization and risk contingency planning that circumvents the dominance of major powers."

(Farhan Hanif Siddiqi - Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad - Volume 42, Issue No. 1, 2022: p. 1-16)

"Pakistan needs a new approach which is currently absent as it continues to be consumed by ideology and internal struggles for power. Going for the 'Jihadist option' has boomeranged while India's strengths have multiplied, earning it a popular global status."

(Touqir Hussain -Dawn- October 4, 2023)

III. Seizing Regional Opportunities:

Strengthening socio-economic linkages with Middle Eastern countries can counterbalance the challenges posed by the region's instability. Emphasizing religious, historical, and cultural ties and leveraging Pakistan's diaspora in the Middle East can contribute to improved relations. Engaging in regional initiatives and diplomatic efforts to bridge the gap between conflicting nations is vital for sustained stability.

"The changing geopolitical landscape of the Middle East has also brought many advantages and challenges for the country..... The opportunities and challenges in the changing global order require a dynamic and creative approach and well-articulated statesmanship."

(Muhammad Amir Rana - Director, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS))

IV. Stabilizing Afghanistan with Regional Support:

Collaborative efforts with regional actors, particularly China, are crucial for stabilizing Afghanistan. Supporting the legitimacy of the Taliban government and preventing the region from becoming a hotbed for adversarial activities requires coordinated regional strategies. Strengthening socio-economic linkages and ensuring Afghanistan's integration into regional stability efforts can contribute to addressing security risks.

Afghanistan's instability impacts Pakistan's security. Pakistan must consider its role in stabilizing the region:

Regional Cooperation: Collaborating with regional actors, including China, Russia, and Iran, can be instrumental in promoting stability in Afghanistan.

"Whenever Pakistan recovers from its current domestic predicament it should prioritise investing diplomatically and economically in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity. This would progressively build goodwill among the Afghan people, eliminate the danger of a two-front pincer situation, and restore China's confidence in its preferred option of Pakistan being able to counter India's hegemonic aspirations in South Asia."

(Ashraf Jehangir Qazi -Dawn- August 17, 2023)

Counterterrorism: Pakistan should work with international partners to combat terrorism emanating from Afghanistan.

'Stable ties with Afghanistan are Pakistan's strategic compulsion. But despite the upsurge in trade between the neighbours, the relationship has been under considerable stress. Islamabad's expectation that the return of a Taliban government would help Pakistan secure its western border has not been met..... The next government should therefore revisit our Afghan policy and evolve an approach, between appeasement and confrontation, that ensures Kabul responds to Pakistan's security concerns.'

(Maleeha Lodhi – Dawn- July 17, 2023)

V. Addressing Non-Traditional Threats:

To mitigate non-traditional threats, Pakistan needs to strengthen institutional policy frameworks aligned with sustainable development goals. Diversifying economic options by forming economic alliances such as the Russia-Iran-China system

to counter climate change vulnerabilities and implement innovative solutions will enhance resilience against non-traditional challenges.

Addressing climate change is a global priority, and Pakistan must align its foreign policy with climate governance:

Global Partnerships: Pakistan should engage in international climate agreements and seek partnerships with countries leading in climate action, which can provide support for climate resilience efforts.

"In developing countries, such as Pakistan, climate change poses a serious challenge to social, environmental and economic development, and lead to migration within and across national borders of Pakistan. The effects of global climate change in Pakistan are already evident in the form of growing frequency of droughts, flooding, increasingly erratic weather behavior, and changes in agricultural patterns, reduction in fresh water supply and the loss of biodiversity.

Mitigating and adapting actions are considered to be the two key ways of combating climate change. The more immediate and pressing task for the country is to prepare itself for adaptation to climate change."

(National Climate Change Policy (NCCP)- 2021)

VI. Proactive Approach and Diplomatic Clarity:

Pakistan's recent foreign policy approach has been reactive rather than proactive. This has resulted in a lack of a coherent and considered strategy. A comprehensive foreign policy review is poised to inject much-needed clarity into Pakistan's diplomatic endeavors, encouraging a proactive stance that effectively responds to emerging challenges.

VII. Strengthening Diplomatic Missions:

The foreign policy review provides an opportunity for Pakistan's diplomatic missions to play a more significant role in shaping policy. Currently, input is sporadically sought on individual issues, but a broader canvas allows for more holistic and creative insights. Diplomatic missions can contribute to strategic foresight and innovative solutions to diplomatic challenges.

VIII. Civil-Military Coordination:

Given that certain critical foreign policy areas are managed by the military, the review process can foster constructive dialogue and collaboration between civilian and military officials. This would contribute to better coordination and perhaps enable the foreign ministry to assert its role as the country's primary line of defense, enhancing its ability to influence decisions in areas that have seen limited civilian involvement.

IX. Managing Relations with India:

Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with India is a vexing challenge, given longstanding security concerns. The abrogation of Article 370 by India in 2019 and subsequent tensions necessitate a structured approach to prevent the escalation of conflicts. Developing a framework for managing these tensions and preventing uncontrolled flare-ups is essential.

Pakistan has supported the right of the Kashmiris to express their aspirations and has condemned any use of force or repression against them.

For Pakistan, resolving this critical issue is crucial to ensuring regional peace and stability. Pakistan should continue to engage bilaterally with India. It needs to engage multilaterally at international forums to find a peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict.

X. Outreach Strategy and Multipolar Engagement:

In an increasingly multipolar world, Pakistan's foreign policy scope must expand beyond traditional diplomatic channels. An effective outreach strategy should encompass not only governmental actors but also engage non-state entities, such as businesses, academia, and civil society, to further Pakistan's foreign policy objectives.

XI. Strategic Neutrality and Economic Integration: The Look East Policy

Amidst global uncertainties, Pakistan's foreign policy blueprint advocates strategic neutrality and economic integration. The proposal of a 'Look East Policy' emphasizes the imperative of aligning with countries in the global south, signing free-trade agreements, and expanding maritime engagement to bolster economic resilience while maintaining strategic neutrality.

Pakistan's look East policy emphasizes the strategic importance of the vibrant economies in East Asia, particularly the Far East, which has become a focal point of global financial activity and business. The region's remarkable growth in infrastructure, trade, and socio-economic development, coupled with its status as a major investment hub, attracts multinational corporations, including those from the US and China. With the Pacific Island Countries (PIC) also falling within the Asia-Pacific sphere, opportunities for investment, tourism, educational exchanges, and business collaborations abound. Despite their small economies, these Pacific islands, targeted by both the US and China, present untapped potential. However, challenges such as unemployment, lack of interconnectivity, and inefficiencies in transport infrastructure exist. In this context, Pakistan sees prospects for investment, educational and cultural exchanges, and cooperation in various domains. As East Asian countries express dissatisfaction with major powers' development projects, there is an opportunity for South Asian, Middle

contributing to the region's socio-economic development and offering a potential catalyst for global economic revival post-Covid-19 and amid geopolitical uncertainties.

"Pakistan has followed the 'Look-West' policy for the last several decades as it has depended heavily on the US, Europe and the West-dominated monetary institutions of the World Bank and IMF for keeping its economy alive. As a regional player, it has aligned itself more with the Middle East especially the Gulf region, while largely neglecting South Asia and East Asia in its past foreign policy formulations. Keeping in view the newly emerging geo-strategic, political and economic trends Pakistan can no more rely on its 'only looking to the West' policy. The new geo-economic realities have compelled all countries to diversify their strategic partnerships and seek out cooperative engagements wherever possible. Within this context, Pakistan needs to 'Look East' now in order to both diversify its strategic partnerships as well as to develop new politico-economic cooperative engagements. As an 'insurance policy', Pakistan needs to link itself with both the economically robust East Asian countries as well as the militarily dominant sole superpower, the United States."

(Saeed Ahmed Ridi - Regional Studies, Vol, XXV, No .1 Winter (p. 64 -92))

5. CONCLUSION:

To conclude, navigating Pakistan's foreign policy in an evolving global landscape is a multifaceted challenge, requiring a nuanced and strategic approach. The country faces complex challenges ranging from strategic neutrality and regional balancing to addressing security concerns, economic stability, and non-traditional threats. The ongoing shifts in global power dynamics, particularly the U.S.-China rivalry, further complicate Pakistan's diplomatic landscape. However, the way forward lies in adopting a balanced approach, leveraging economic partnerships with diverse global players, and proactively addressing challenges. Embracing strategic neutrality, fostering economic integration through a 'Look East Policy,' and strengthening diplomatic clarity are crucial components of Pakistan's foreign policy course in the multipolar world. The nation must seize regional opportunities, contribute to stabilizing Afghanistan, and effectively counter non-traditional threats to secure its interests and enhance global standing. Through comprehensive diplomatic endeavors and collaboration between civil and military authorities, Pakistan can shape a foreign policy that not only safeguards its national interests but also contributes positively to regional and global stability.

THE BEST BOOKS FOR UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN AN EVOLVING GLOBAL LANDSCAPE

1. **Pakistan and a World in Disorder by Javed Husain**

The book titled *Pakistan and a World in Disorder – A Grand Strategy for the Twenty-First Century* discusses Pakistan's policies in the 21st century at length. Taking advantage of his vast experience, the author of the book Ambassador Javid Husain, a career diplomat who has served on important positions around the world, ponders Pakistan's foreign policy and its achievements and shortcomings. He argues that Pakistan's foreign policy is "out of sync" (p.1) with the realities both at regional and global level and, therefore, a review is imperative. To some extent, the clash between different ministries and organisations in Pakistan is responsible for this situation. The author, therefore, makes a strong case for the adoption of a coherent and well thought-out grand strategy.

2. **Pakistan: Statecraft and Geopolitics in Today's World by Shahid Javed Burki**

This book discusses the external developments in recent decades that are relevant for Pakistan and focuses on how the changes that are occurring outside the country are likely to influence the direction it takes in the future.

Some of the topics discussed in the book are globalization ; demography; geography; migrations; religion; climate change; and global warning; American China trade war; Americas conflict with Iran; India's decision to absorb Kashmir as a territory of the Indian Union; and the impact of international migration on the political systems in several Western nation.

3. **Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics – Edited By Ghulam Ali**

This book analyses Pakistan's foreign policy and external relations with a focus on contemporary developments, including the impact of the new government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, the powerful military, and the "middle power" status.

Structured in two parts - Foundation and Operationalization - the book provides a broad overview of Pakistan's foreign policy and addresses specific foreign policy choices. Contributor's explore issues such as Pakistan's middle power status from a theoretical perspective, Imran Khan's foreign policy, Pakistan's relations with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the EU, and Pakistan's evolving Indian Ocean strategy. Based on in-depth interviews with Pakistani scholars, politicians, and diplomats, the book offers a timely perspective on Pakistan's foreign policy.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: GOING FROM BAD TO MUCH WORSE

Synopsis:

1. **Introduction**
2. **Historical Background**
3. **Importance of Afghanistan for Pakistan**
 - I. Strategic Depth and Security Concerns
 - II. Economic and Trade Opportunities
 - III. Refugee Management and Humanitarian Considerations
 - IV. Countering Terrorism and Regional Stability
4. **Pakistan's Afghanistan policy**
 - I. Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: A Historical Overview
 - II. Strategic Depth Policy: Origins and Missteps
 - III. Pakistan's Missteps in Afghanistan: A Strategic Predicament
5. **Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban: Why Friends are Becoming Foes**
 - I. Historical Interdependence and Changing Dynamic
 - II. Taliban's Support for Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)
 - III. Differences in Approaches Toward Militancy
 - IV. Refugee Management and Repatriation Pressures
 - V. Competition for Regional Influence
 - VI. Divergent Views on Foreign Engagement
 - VII. Taliban's Internal Dynamics and Factionalism
6. **Implications Of Deteriorated Relationships For Pakistan**
 - I. Security Threats and Escalation of Terrorism
 - II. Economic Consequences and Trade Disruptions
 - III. Strained Diplomatic Relations and Regional Isolation
 - IV. Refugee Management and Humanitarian Concerns
 - V. Impact on Regional Stability and Geopolitical Dynamics
7. **Stance Of Both Countries On Their Bilateral Relations**
 - I. Pakistan's Stance: Necessity for Security Measures and Counterterrorism Cooperation
 - II. Afghanistan's Stance: Denial of Accusations and Emphasis on Bilateral Dialogue

8. Way Forward

- I. Diplomatic Engagement and Trust-Building Initiatives
- II. Counterterrorism Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing
- III. Economic Integration and Development Initiatives
- IV. Humanitarian Approach to Afghan Refugees
- V. Border Management and Resolution of Disputes
- VI. Rethinking the Concept of "Strategic Depth"

9. Conclusion

PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: GOING FROM BAD TO MUCH WORSE

1. INTRODUCTION

"Clashes along the disputed Afghanistan-Pakistan border have been a recurring problem. Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in August 2021, the frequency of such clashes has only increased. Until recently, Pakistan has downplayed the border clashes, calling for a diplomatic resolution to the problem, but the issue of unrest in Pakistan's Pashtun belt has become too big to be brushed aside."

(Vinay Kaura | Middle East Institute)

The historical tapestry of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations reveals a complex interplay of strategic ambitions, regional dynamics, and recurring challenges. Rooted in decades of geopolitical maneuvering and influenced by policies such as Pakistan's pursuit of "Strategic Depth," the relationship has navigated through periods of cooperation, mutual suspicion, and outright tension. From hosting Afghan refugees during the Soviet invasion to supporting factions during the Cold War and the subsequent rise of the Taliban, the two nations have shared a multifaceted journey. However, recent developments, including the repatriation of Afghan refugees and heightened concerns about terrorism, underscore the need for a recalibration in the relationship. As both countries grapple with evolving security landscapes and changing regional dynamics, the path forward requires nuanced diplomacy, acknowledgment of shared challenges, and a commitment to constructive dialogue for a more stable and collaborative future.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical backdrop of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is woven with intricate threads of geopolitical strategies, shifting alliances, and persistent challenges. Originating from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the subsequent influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan marked the beginning of a shared history shaped by regional conflicts. During the Cold War, Pakistan, with support from the United States, played a

pivotal role in training and supporting Islamist groups fighting against Soviet forces. The fall of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of the Taliban, a group heavily invested in by Pakistan as a strategic asset to secure its interests and counter Indian influence in the region. However, the aftermath of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror and the return of the Taliban to power in 2021 has brought new complexities, with accusations of terrorism and increased tensions.

3. IMPORTANCE OF AFGHANISTAN FOR PAKISTAN

I. Strategic Depth and Security Concerns:

Pakistan has historically considered Afghanistan as crucial for its strategic depth, especially in the context of its rivalry with India. The concept of strategic depth involves having a friendly and pliable neighbor to serve as a buffer against potential threats. Afghanistan, with its geopolitical significance, provides Pakistan with a strategic advantage by acting as a defensive barrier.

II. Economic and Trade Opportunities:

Afghanistan serves as a vital economic partner for Pakistan, offering trade and investment opportunities. The two countries share a long and porous border, facilitating the flow of goods and people. The potential for enhanced economic collaboration, including trade in minerals, agricultural products, and energy resources, is substantial. Moreover, the establishment of stable trade routes through Afghanistan is critical for expanding Pakistan's connectivity with Central Asian countries. Both nations have the opportunity to foster economic growth through regional cooperation, provided diplomatic challenges are effectively addressed.

III. Refugee Management and Humanitarian Considerations:

The longstanding Afghan refugee presence in Pakistan highlights the humanitarian aspect of their relationship. Pakistan has played host to millions of Afghan refugees for decades, particularly during periods of conflict and instability in Afghanistan. Managing this refugee population has posed challenges for Pakistan's economy, resources, and social fabric. The recent decision to repatriate Afghan refugees reflects the evolving dynamics and the need for a comprehensive approach to address humanitarian concerns while maintaining security interests.

IV. Countering Terrorism and Regional Stability:

The stability of Afghanistan is inherently linked to regional security, and Pakistan has a vested interest in ensuring a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. The presence of militant groups, such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has been a shared challenge for both nations. Effective collaboration in counterterrorism efforts is essential to curb the influence of extremist elements that pose threats to internal security. A stable Afghanistan contributes to regional stability, curbing the spread of extremism and fostering an environment conducive to economic development and cooperation among

neighboring countries. Addressing mutual security concerns collaboratively can pave the way for sustained peace in the region.

4. PAKISTAN'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY

I. Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: A Historical Overview

For decades, Pakistan's Afghanistan policy has been marked by intricate geopolitical considerations, security imperatives, and a quest for strategic depth. The roots of this policy trace back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, providing Pakistan with an opportunity to shape its strategic interests in the region. During the Cold War, with U.S. assistance, Pakistan became a key player in supporting Islamist groups fighting against Soviet forces. The subsequent rise of the Taliban in the 1990s further solidified Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Over the years, Pakistan has sought to leverage its ties with Afghan factions, particularly the Taliban, to secure a friendly government in Kabul and counter perceived Indian influence. However, this approach has been marred by unintended consequences, contributing to regional instability and fostering resentment within Afghanistan.

II. Strategic Depth Policy: Origins and Missteps

The concept of "strategic depth" emerged as a cornerstone of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy, envisioning Afghanistan as a buffer against potential threats from India. This policy aimed to secure a friendly regime in Kabul that would provide strategic depth in the event of a military conflict with India. However, the implementation of this policy involved meddling in Afghanistan's domestic politics, supporting militant groups, and fostering suspicions among Afghans about Pakistan's intentions. The historical alliance with the Taliban, cultivated during the Soviet-Afghan War, ultimately led to accusations of playing a double game – supporting the Taliban while ostensibly aligning with the U.S. in the Global War on Terror. The fallout from this approach includes the Taliban's hesitation to act against the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the escalation of militancy within Pakistan.

III. Pakistan's Missteps in Afghanistan: A Strategic Predicament

Pakistan's missteps in Afghanistan are evident in the unintended consequences of its historical policies. The investment in the Taliban as a strategic asset has backfired, with the Taliban's return to power coinciding with a surge in terrorist attacks within Pakistan. The strategic depth once sought has transformed into a strategic predicament, as militant groups, including the TTP, find safe havens in Afghanistan. The recent move to repatriate Afghan refugees is viewed as a response to security concerns, yet it raises suspicions and escalates tensions between the two neighbors. The failure to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan has led to anti-Pakistan sentiments, complicating the regional security landscape.

5. PAKISTAN AND THE AFGHAN TALIBAN: WHY FRIENDS ARE BECOMING FOES

I. Historical Interdependence and Changing Dynamics:

The historical interdependence between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, rooted in the Soviet-Afghan War era, has undergone significant transformations. Initially allies against the Soviet forces, the relationship evolved as the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan. However, changing geopolitical dynamics, internal shifts within the Taliban, and evolving regional circumstances have altered the nature of this historical alliance. While the historical connection provided a foundation, the shifting sands of regional politics have given rise to new challenges and frictions.

II. Taliban's Support for Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP):

Another key factor straining the relationship is the Taliban's alleged support for the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a militant group operating within Pakistan. Over the years, the TTP has posed a significant security threat to Pakistan, carrying out attacks and fostering instability. The Afghan Taliban's perceived backing of the TTP has escalated tensions, as Pakistan accuses the Taliban of enabling terrorism on its soil, leading to a divergence in their strategic interests.

The number of fatalities from terrorist attacks in the two western provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan bordering Afghanistan has increased by 65 per cent since the Taliban take-over of Afghanistan.

(Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS))

III. Differences in Approaches Toward Militancy:

The evolving nature of the Taliban's approach toward militancy has become a source of contention. As the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan, their focus shifted from insurgency against foreign forces to consolidating control domestically. This shift in focus has led to differences in approaches, with Pakistan emphasizing the need for the Taliban to act against the TTP, while the Taliban downplays the significance of the TTP's actions within Pakistan, labeling it as an internal issue.

IV. Refugee Management and Repatriation Pressures:

The recent decision by Pakistan to repatriate Afghan refugees has added strain to the relationship. Pakistan contends that undocumented Afghan refugees contribute to terrorism within its borders, linking it to the TTP's activities. The repatriation move is seen as a pressure tactic, raising concerns within the Taliban leadership. The complex interplay of refugee management, security concerns, and bilateral tensions underscores the multifaceted nature of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship.

"After non-cooperation by the Afghan interim government, Pakistan has decided to take matters into its own hands -- and Pakistan's recent actions are neither unexpected or surprising".

(Anwaarul Haq Kakar , Caretaker Prime Minister)

V. Competition for Regional Influence:

Both Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban seek to secure their interests in the region, leading to a competition for regional influence. The Taliban's efforts to establish themselves as the legitimate government in Afghanistan and Pakistan's historical pursuit of strategic depth have created overlapping spheres of influence. The competition for influence, especially in the context of economic partnerships and international recognition, has intensified, contributing to strains in their once-cohesive relationship.

VI. Divergent Views on Foreign Engagement:

The Afghan Taliban's engagement with foreign powers, particularly Pakistan's regional rival India, has fueled suspicions and divergent views. While the Taliban government has shown interest in building relations with India, Pakistan remains wary of deepening ties between the two. The divergence in foreign engagement strategies, coupled with historical mistrust, has further complicated diplomatic relations and added to the challenges of sustaining a cooperative partnership.

VII. Taliban's Internal Dynamics and Factionalism:

The internal dynamics and factionalism within the Taliban play a significant role in shaping its relationship with Pakistan. Different factions within the Taliban may hold varying views on Pakistan, with some leaders expressing concerns about Pakistan's policies and actions. The unity within the Taliban is not absolute, and internal divisions contribute to shifting dynamics in its external relations. Understanding the nuanced factional dynamics within the Taliban is crucial for comprehending the complexities in its interactions with Pakistan.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF DETERIORATED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN FOR PAKISTAN

I. Security Threats and Escalation of Terrorism:

The deteriorated relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan poses a significant security threat to Pakistan, with the potential for an escalation of terrorism. The strained ties, particularly due to the alleged support of the Afghan Taliban for the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), heighten the risk of cross-border militant activities. This situation could lead to an increase in terrorist attacks within Pakistan, challenging its internal stability and posing a direct threat to the safety of its citizens. The spillover effect of instability from Afghanistan could exacerbate Pakistan's existing security challenges.

II. Economic Consequences and Trade Disruptions:

The souring of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan carries economic implications, particularly in terms of trade disruptions and economic cooperation. The two nations share a significant border, and any deterioration in diplomatic ties could hamper cross-border trade and economic collaboration. Pakistan's economic interests in Afghanistan, including investments and trade partnerships, may face setbacks, impacting the overall economic stability of the region. Trade routes, vital for economic activities, could experience disruptions, hindering the flow of goods and creating economic challenges for both nations.

III. Strained Diplomatic Relations and Regional Isolation:

The strained diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan contribute to the risk of regional isolation for Pakistan. As geopolitical dynamics evolve, maintaining positive relations with neighboring countries is crucial for diplomatic influence and regional cooperation. The deterioration in ties with Afghanistan could isolate Pakistan diplomatically, limiting its ability to navigate regional challenges effectively. This isolation may also impact Pakistan's standing in international forums and hinder its efforts to pursue diplomatic solutions to broader regional issues.

IV. Refugee Management and Humanitarian Concerns:

The decision by Pakistan to repatriate Afghan refugees, fueled by security concerns and strained relations, raises humanitarian and refugee management challenges. Large-scale repatriation efforts could lead to a humanitarian crisis, both in terms of displaced populations and strained resources to manage their return. This situation may have domestic repercussions for Pakistan, including potential social unrest and strained infrastructure. Balancing security considerations with humanitarian concerns becomes crucial in managing the consequences of strained relationships on refugee populations.

All in all, the expulsion en masse of the Afghan refugees will make things worse, bilaterally, and quite possibly, regionally. Certainly, no one's security will improve; if anything, it will further destabilise Afghanistan already tottering on the brink of collapse.

(Volker Türk, United Nations Human Rights Chief)

V. Impact on Regional Stability and Geopolitical Dynamics:

The deteriorated relationships between Pakistan and Afghanistan extend beyond bilateral consequences and have broader implications for regional stability and geopolitical dynamics. The heightened tensions contribute to an uncertain regional landscape, impacting neighboring countries and global powers involved in the region. Instability in Afghanistan, coupled with strained Pakistan-Afghanistan ties, can create a volatile environment with implications for ongoing conflicts, terrorism, and the balance

of power in South Asia. Pakistan's role in regional stability becomes increasingly challenging in the face of these complex geopolitical shifts.

7. STANCE OF BOTH COUNTRIES ON THEIR BILATERAL RELATION

I. Pakistan's Stance: Necessity for Security Measures and Counterterrorism Cooperation

Pakistan asserts that its actions, including the repatriation of Afghan refugees and increased security measures, are driven by the imperative to address security threats emanating from Afghan soil. The country emphasizes the need to counteract the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which it claims has found sanctuary and support within Afghanistan. The alleged link between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP has become a focal point for Pakistan's security concerns. From Pakistan's perspective, taking stringent measures, such as the expulsion of undocumented Afghan refugees, is deemed essential to mitigate the risks associated with cross-border terrorism. The urgency to safeguard its citizens and territory has prompted Pakistan to adopt a proactive approach, seeking to disrupt any potential collaboration between the Afghan Taliban and domestic militant groups.

II. Afghanistan's Stance: Denial of Accusations and Emphasis on Bilateral Dialogue

Afghanistan, on the other hand, denies the accusations leveled by Pakistan and views the repatriation of Afghan refugees as a coercive tactic rather than a genuine security measure. The interim Afghan government maintains that the allegations of supporting the TTP are baseless and constitute an internal issue for Pakistan. From Afghanistan's perspective, the forced return of Afghan refugees is perceived as a response to political and strategic considerations rather than a legitimate security concern. The Afghan leadership emphasizes the importance of resolving differences through diplomatic means and bilateral dialogue. Afghanistan contends that addressing shared security concerns requires collaboration and joint efforts rather than unilateral measures. The denial of alleged support for the TTP and the call for diplomatic engagement underscore Afghanistan's commitment to resolving issues through peaceful means and fostering regional cooperation.

8. WAY FORWARD

I. Diplomatic Engagement and Trust-Building Initiatives

Pakistan can take significant strides towards improving relations with Afghanistan through sustained diplomatic engagement. This involves fostering open channels of communication, promoting dialogue at various levels, and building mutual trust. Establishing a framework for regular high-level talks can provide a platform for addressing concerns, dispelling misunderstandings, and identifying areas of cooperation.

Confidence-building measures, such as cultural exchanges and joint initiatives, can contribute to thawing the historical mistrust that has plagued the bilateral relationship.

Pakistan needs to boost its own credibility by dissuading the Taliban government in Afghanistan — through incentives and disincentives — from becoming a global pariah, even in the Muslim world.

(Ashraf Jehangir Qazi | Pakistan's Afghanistan policy)

II. Counterterrorism Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing

Given the shared threat of terrorism, enhanced counterterrorism cooperation is paramount. Pakistan and Afghanistan must collaborate closely on intelligence sharing, joint operations, and the dismantling of terrorist networks that pose a threat to both nations. This pragmatic approach aligns with the interests of both countries in ensuring regional stability and mitigating the risk of transnational terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. A coordinated effort in tackling groups like the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) can be a common ground for mutual benefit.

III. Economic Integration and Development Initiatives

Economic collaboration and development initiatives offer a tangible path towards fostering goodwill and stability. Joint economic projects, trade agreements, and infrastructure development can create shared interests and contribute to the prosperity of both nations. Pakistan's expertise in various sectors, coupled with Afghanistan's strategic location, can form the basis for mutually beneficial economic partnerships. Additionally, facilitating people-to-people connections, such as educational exchanges and business interactions, can further strengthen economic ties and promote a sense of shared destiny.

Pakistan should invest diplomatically and economically in Afghanistan's stability and prosperity.

(Ashraf Jehangir Qazi | Pakistan's Afghanistan policy)

IV. Humanitarian Approach to Afghan Refugees

The repatriation of Afghan refugees requires a nuanced and humanitarian approach. Pakistan should work in coordination with international organizations, such as the UNHCR, to ensure that the process is fair, inclusive, and respects the rights of individuals. A comprehensive policy that considers the genuine needs and concerns of refugees, coupled with measures to address the security apprehensions that led to the repatriation decision, can help build confidence and alleviate tensions.

V. Border Management and Resolution of Disputes

The longstanding border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan demands a diplomatic and cooperative resolution. Both countries should engage in sincere efforts to demarcate and manage the border, respecting each other's territorial integrity. Establishing effective border management mechanisms can reduce the likelihood of

military tensions, frequent border closures, and instances of cross-border hostilities, fostering an environment conducive to improved relations.

VI. Rethinking the Concept of "Strategic Depth"

A fundamental shift in Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan involves reevaluating the outdated concept of "strategic depth." Recognizing the evolving geopolitical landscape, Pakistan should prioritize the establishment of a stable, sovereign, and friendly Afghanistan rather than seeking strategic advantages against perceived adversaries. This shift in mindset can pave the way for a more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship, free from the historical baggage that has hindered progress. Embracing a regional perspective that promotes peace and stability is crucial for forging a new chapter in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

"Pakistan remains ambivalent about Islamist extremists, and its misguided Afghan policies will continue to stoke Islamist radicalism at home and challenge the state's authority. Pakistan cannot make lasting peace with Afghanistan, even under the Afghan Taliban, as long as it continues to focus on a utopian Islamic vision by pursuing military adventures in Afghanistan and Kashmir predicated on jihad. Therefore, a sweeping restructuring of Pakistan's two mutually conflicting identities — as a revisionist state on Kashmir and a status-quo country in relation to Afghanistan — becomes less of a radical idea and more of a blueprint for how to stave off further crises."

(Vinay Kaura | Middle East Institute)

9. CONCLUSION:

In a nutshell, the intricate tapestry of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, woven with historical complexities and shifting geopolitical landscapes, demands a recalibration for a more stable and collaborative future. The current trajectory, marked by border clashes, divergent security interests, and strained diplomatic ties, poses significant challenges. However, the way forward lies in diplomatic engagement, trust-building initiatives, and a fundamental shift in mindset. By prioritizing counterterrorism cooperation, economic integration, and a humanitarian approach to refugee management, both nations can chart a course towards mutual benefit and regional stability. The resolution of border disputes and a reevaluation of outdated strategic paradigms, such as "strategic depth," are essential for forging a new chapter in this crucial relationship. As the region navigates uncertainties, the imperative is clear: a commitment to constructive dialogue and cooperation is vital for a brighter and more harmonious Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship.

UNRAVELING THE COMPLEXITIES OF PAKISTAN-IRAN RELATIONS

Recent Escalation and Diplomatic Reconciliation

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UNRAVELING THE COMPLEXITIES OF PAKISTAN-IRAN RELATIONS

Recent Escalation and Diplomatic Reconciliation

1. INTRODUCTION

"Relations between Pakistan and Iran have by and large been cordial, although they've sparred intermittently over attacks by militants along their porous 900-kilometer-long (560-mile-long) border. Tensions have flared anew, with the two Muslim nations conducting strikes in each other's territories."

(Ismail Dilawar and Patrick Sykes | Bloomberg)

The longstanding relationship between Pakistan and Iran, characterized by shared history, cultural ties, and diplomatic engagement, recently faced a challenging episode marked by cross-border missile and drone strikes. Despite occasional tensions, the two nations have historically maintained cordial ties, with Iran being the first country to recognize Pakistan's independence in 1947. The multifaceted dynamics of their relationship include common geopolitical interests, economic cooperation, and cultural affinities, exemplified by the historical spread of the Persian language to the Indian subcontinent. However, recent military exchanges and the withdrawal of ambassadors underscored a complex regional context and the need for diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions, restore ties, and navigate shared challenges such as border security and insurgency in the Balochistan region. As both countries restore diplomatic relations, the resilience of their historical bonds and the potential for enhanced collaboration in areas like energy, trade, and regional stability come to the forefront.

2. THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The historical and cultural background of Pakistan-Iran relations is intricately woven into the fabric of their shared past, marked by ancient civilizations and historical epochs. Iran, known as Persia until 1935, boasts a recorded history dating back to 550 BCE, witnessing the rise of the Achaemenid Empire under Cyrus the Great. The subsequent Sassanid Empire, spanning nearly nine centuries, further enriched Persian culture and language. This historical journey, extending from the Achaemenid to the Sassanid era, laid the foundation for Iran's deep-rooted pride in its history, culture, and language. The Persian language, spreading to India in the 16th century, became a cultural bridge, influencing the linguistic landscape of the region. Figures like Allama Iqbal, revered in Iran as Iqbal-i-Lahoori, and the resonance of Persian in the works of poets like Ghalib, illustrate the enduring cultural connections between the Persian mainland and the territories of present-day Pakistan.

Diplomatically, Iran played a pivotal role in recognizing Pakistan's independence in 1947, becoming the first country to do so. This historical camaraderie set the stage for diplomatic relations, with Iran hosting Pakistan's inaugural embassy abroad. Despite periodic challenges, the two nations have maintained cordial ties, navigating geopolitical shifts. Recent events, such as cross-border military incidents, underscore the need for diplomatic solutions to address border security concerns and insurgency in the Balochistan region. As diplomatic ties are restored, the historical and cultural underpinnings provide a resilient foundation for potential collaboration in critical areas such as energy, trade, and regional stability, reflecting the enduring nature of their deep-rooted connections.

3. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PAK-IRAN RELATIONS

The relationship between Pakistan and Iran has navigated a complex terrain, marked by historical affinities, diplomatic cooperation, and occasional tensions. From the early recognition of Pakistan by Iran in 1947 to hosting the first Pakistani embassy abroad, the foundations were laid for what would become a generally amicable relationship. Shared historical and cultural ties, evident in linguistic bonds and literary connections, have contributed to a strong people-to-people connection.

However, recent escalations in cross-border militancy, terrorist attacks, and retaliations have strained the security dynamics along the 1,000-kilometer border, leading to military actions from both sides. Geopolitical alignments, with Iran supporting Shia groups in the Middle East, add complexity, given Pakistan's ties with Saudi Arabia and the United States. Internal political developments in both countries, economic barriers influenced by international sanctions on Iran, and misinterpretation and lack of communication have further contributed to recent escalations.

Despite challenges, areas of cooperation exist, particularly in energy collaboration through the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, trade, and economic partnerships. The recent restoration of diplomatic ties, following missile and drone strikes, reflects a shared recognition of the strategic importance of a stable relationship for regional stability. Both countries have the potential to leverage their geographical locations, economic collaboration, and strategic partnerships to address regional challenges and foster mutual prosperity.

4. CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES IN IRAN PAKISTAN RELATIONS:

I. Historical Foundations:

Iran and Pakistan, two nations with deep historical roots, have shared a relationship shaped by millennia of cultural exchanges and diplomatic milestones. Historical ties, dating back to the Achaemenid Empire in 550 BCE and the subsequent Sassanid era, demonstrate the longevity of their connection. Despite intermittent rivalries, the Battle of Qadisiya in 636 CE being a notable example, the recognition of Pakistan by Iran in 1947 marked a significant diplomatic milestone, solidifying a foundation for diplomatic relations.

II. Cultural Affinities and Linguistic Bonds:

Culturally, the convergence between Iran and Pakistan is evident in their linguistic and literary affinities. The Persian language's influence on Urdu, particularly during the Mughal era, showcases the depth of their shared cultural heritage. Renowned poets like Allama Iqbal, celebrated in both nations, further emphasize the literary connections. The people of Iran, proud of their history and language, have historically maintained a sense of nationalistic fervor, contributing to the cultural tapestry shared with Pakistan.

III. Geopolitical Challenges and Divergences:

Recent events, such as cross-border military incidents in Balochistan, underscore the contemporary challenges in Iran-Pakistan relations. While historical and cultural ties provide a strong foundation, geopolitical factors, including border security concerns and insurgency issues, highlight areas of divergence. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline agreement, aimed at addressing Pakistan's energy needs, faced hurdles due to international sanctions on Iran. Navigating these geopolitical challenges requires nuanced diplomacy to balance convergences and address divergences for a stable and cooperative relationship.

5. IMPORTANCE OF IRAN FOR PAKISTAN:

I. Energy Cooperation:

Iran's considerable natural resources, boasting the second-largest gas reserves globally, present a significant opportunity for energy cooperation, particularly for energy-deficient Pakistan. Despite challenges posed by international sanctions, the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline remains a crucial project with the potential to address Pakistan's persistent energy crisis. The collaboration, if successfully navigated through obstacles, can not only contribute to energy security but also foster a resilient partnership in the face of external pressures. Both nations must actively seek innovative solutions to overcome impediments and ensure the realization of this strategic energy collaboration.

"The proposed pipeline spans over 2,700 kilometers with 1,100 km-long half falling inside the Iranian territory. If it becomes operational, the project, which has capacity to carry 150 million cubic meters of gas, can greatly ease Pakistan's energy crisis."

(TRT World)

II. Historical and Cultural Ties:

Delving into the rich tapestry of historical and cultural affinities between Iran and Pakistan unveils a profound connection that transcends geopolitical complexities. The enduring ties are deeply rooted in shared linguistic bonds, cultural exchanges, and literary connections, exemplified by the influence of Persian on Urdu. These common threads weave a fabric of understanding and mutual respect, forming the basis for a robust people-to-people connection. Recognizing the strength embedded in historical and cultural ties becomes imperative for both nations to navigate contemporary challenges. Nurturing these connections can not only enhance diplomatic relations but also serve as a resilient foundation, anchoring the relationship in times of geopolitical turbulence.

III. Geopolitical Stability:

The significance of promoting geopolitical stability in the region becomes paramount, considering the shared borders with Afghanistan and the intricate regional dynamics. Both Iran and Pakistan have a vested interest in collaborative efforts to manage cross-border challenges, including militancy and insurgency. By jointly addressing these issues, the two nations can contribute to fostering enduring peace and security, thereby creating a stable environment that benefits not only themselves but the entire region.

IV. Trade and Economic Opportunities:

Navigating through challenges, the trade potential between Iran and Pakistan stands as a promising avenue for collaboration. While informal trade has persisted, recent initiatives, such as cracking down on smuggling and establishing border markets at crossing points, signal a shared commitment to enhance formal trade. Formalizing

economic ties presents a significant opportunity to unlock substantial trade and economic benefits for both nations. By leveraging economic cooperation, Iran and Pakistan can not only spur shared prosperity but also pave the way for comprehensive development in the region.

In 2020, Iran's export to Pakistan reached 352 million dollars to rank third in Iran's exports. The two countries have ambitious plans to increase their bilateral trade to five billion dollars by 2023. Overall, according to Iranian customs, Iranian exports to Pakistan in the first half of the current year have amounted to \$321 million, while imports from Pakistan have reached \$110 million.

6. IMPORTANCE OF PAKISTAN FOR IRAN:

I. Strategic Regional Partnerships:

Given Pakistan's pivotal geopolitical location, it emerges as a crucial player in shaping the dynamics of the region. For Iran, forging strategic partnerships with Pakistan offers valuable opportunities for joint efforts in addressing common regional challenges. The recent restoration of diplomatic ties, even amid cross-border incidents, underscores the strategic imperative of maintaining a stable and cooperative relationship to contribute to broader regional stability.

II. Economic Collaboration and Trade Routes:

The strategic positioning of the Gwadar port in Pakistan and the Chabahar port in Iran provides a foundation for fostering economic collaboration and establishing efficient trade routes. Recognizing the complementary roles of these ports and exploring extensions of transformative projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to include Iran can unlock new avenues for robust economic cooperation. This collaboration has the potential to not only enhance trade but also stimulate economic growth for the mutual benefit of both nations.

III. Counteracting Isolation:

Iran, facing international pressures and sanctions, benefits from cultivating diplomatic ties and partnerships in the region. Pakistan, as a neighbor and historically friendly nation, provides Iran with an opportunity to counteract isolation. Strengthening diplomatic relations with Pakistan allows Iran to maintain a network of regional allies and mitigate external pressures.

IV. Cultural and Religious Bonds:

The cultural and religious bonds shared between Iran and Pakistan, particularly in the context of Shia-Muslim communities, contribute to a sense of shared identity. Building on these bonds fosters cultural diplomacy and enhances people-to-people connections. Iran can leverage these ties to promote understanding and goodwill, both at the diplomatic and societal levels.

7. RECENT ESCALATION BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND IRAN

The recent escalation between Iran and Pakistan, marked by a series of military strikes, unfolded against a backdrop of historical ties and contemporary challenges. On January 16, Iran launched missiles and drones into the Balochistan region in western Pakistan, targeting bases of the militant separatist group Jaish al-Adl. Two days later, Pakistan retaliated with rockets and drones, striking sites in Iran reportedly used by Baloch militant groups. Iran claimed as many as nine foreigners, including four children, died in the Pakistani attack. In response to Iran's strike, Pakistan recalled its ambassador and asked Iran's envoy not to re-enter the country. The situation led to heightened tensions, culminating in the expulsion of ambassadors. However, diplomatic ties were later restored, emphasizing the strategic importance of maintaining stability in the region. The recent events underscore the complexities and challenges that have emerged within the broader context of Pakistan-Iran relations.

8. CAUSES OF ESCALATION

I. Cross-Border Militancy:

The recent escalation in Pakistan-Iran relations finds its roots in the persistent challenges related to cross-border militancy. Incidents involving militant groups like Jaish al Adl, which operates in the border region, and Baloch insurgent organizations have significantly strained the security dynamics along the 1,000-kilometer border. This heightened tension has resulted in military actions from both sides as they grapple with the complexities of addressing and containing cross-border militancy, adding a layer of complexity to their diplomatic relations.

II. Misinterpretation and Lack of Communication:

The recent escalation in Pakistan-Iran relations can be attributed to persistent challenges related to cross-border militancy. Incidents involving militant groups like Jaish al Adl and Baloch insurgent organizations have strained the security dynamics along the 1,000-kilometer border, leading to military actions from both sides. The tit-for-tat cycle of terrorist attacks and retaliations has exacerbated tensions. The killing of Iranian border guards by Jaish al Adl members and subsequent attacks on Baloch separatists by Pakistan resulted in a series of counterattacks. Such incidents escalate hostilities and prompt military responses, impacting diplomatic relations. The misinterpretation of each other's actions and a lack of effective communication mechanisms have further fueled the crisis. The surprise air raids by Iran caught Pakistan off guard, leading to perceptions of betrayal. Enhanced communication and better understanding could have potentially prevented the rapid deterioration of relations.

III. Regional Dynamics and Wider Conflicts:

The broader regional dynamics, including the ongoing conflicts between Israel and Hamas, have spilled over into the Pakistan-Iran relationship. As both countries

grapple with their own security concerns and regional pressures, the external environment has influenced their actions, leading to a heightened risk of conflicts. The Middle East's complex geopolitical landscape, marked by tensions between Iran and Israel, has created a volatile backdrop for the Pakistan-Iran relationship. The overlapping crises in the region, such as Israel's conflict with Hamas, contribute to the overall instability. This wider context magnifies the challenges faced by Pakistan and Iran, making it imperative for them to navigate carefully amid regional complexities.

IV. Geopolitical Alignments:

The geopolitical alignments of Iran, particularly its involvement with Shia groups in the Middle East, introduce an additional layer of complexity to the Pakistan-Iran relationship. Iran's support for groups like Houthis in Yemen and Hezbollah in Lebanon creates challenges for Pakistan, given its historically close ties with Saudi Arabia and the United States. Navigating these geopolitical intricacies requires careful diplomatic maneuvering to avoid further escalation and foster understanding between the two nations.

"Saudi Arabia has had a great deal of influence in Pakistan for decades, and the challenging relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the severance of ties between the two countries have affected relations between Tehran and Islamabad."

Saudi Arabia has sought to leverage its great financial influence over Islamabad to distance it from Iran, helping to further isolate Tehran in the region and assist the U.S.-led campaign of "maximum pressure."

(Dr. Muhammad Salami | Gulf International Forum)

V. Internal Political Developments:

Internal political developments within both countries have also played a role in contributing to the escalation of tensions. In Pakistan, the controversial elections, along with allegations of political meddling and the significant role of the military, set a backdrop for sensitive interactions with neighboring Iran. Simultaneously, Iran's internal challenges, including recent bombings and security concerns, may influence its external engagements, shaping the context within which diplomatic relations unfold.

VI. Economic and Trade Barriers:

Despite the historical goodwill between Pakistan and Iran, economic and trade barriers have hindered the realization of the full potential of their bilateral cooperation. International sanctions imposed on Iran have significantly impacted economic ties, preventing the full implementation of collaborative projects such as the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. This symbol of energy collaboration faces obstacles due to sanctions, highlighting the broader economic challenges that impede the strengthening of ties between the two nations.

"Pakistan has displayed great inertia in constructing the pipeline, to the increasing frustration of Iranian officials. Iran completed its section of the gas pipeline up to the border, but Pakistan did not, persistently refusing to fulfill its commitments."

(Dr. Muhammad Salami | Gulf International Forum)

9. REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF ESCALATION

I. Security Fallout and Cross-Border Militancy:

The escalation in Pakistan-Iran relations carries significant implications for regional security. The ongoing cross-border militancy involving groups like Jaish al Adl and Baloch separatists not only destabilizes the immediate border region but also raises concerns for neighboring countries. The tit-for-tat actions, including air raids and missile strikes, set a precedent for addressing security challenges through military means, potentially encouraging other regional actors to adopt similar strategies. This could lead to a broader regional security fallout with an increased risk of cross-border militant activities affecting neighboring nations.

II. Geopolitical Alignments and Power Dynamics:

The geopolitical alignments of Pakistan and Iran have broader implications for the regional power dynamics. As Iran engages with Shia groups in the Middle East and Pakistan maintains close ties with Saudi Arabia and the United States, the evolving relationships contribute to a complex regional landscape. The escalation may prompt other regional actors to reassess their alliances and strategic positions, potentially fueling a shift in power dynamics. The interplay of these geopolitical factors can influence regional stability and cooperation, impacting not only Pakistan and Iran but also neighboring countries caught in the crossfire of regional rivalries.

III. Economic and Trade Disruptions:

The regional escalation poses economic and trade disruptions that extend beyond the borders of Pakistan and Iran. The historical goodwill between the two nations, despite economic and trade barriers, has the potential to be undermined. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, a symbol of energy collaboration, faces further obstacles, impacting economic ties. Additionally, regional instability often deters foreign investment and hampers trade routes that traverse through the region. Neighboring countries, dependent on stable economic relations with both Pakistan and Iran, may experience economic repercussions due to the fallout, contributing to a wider economic impact in the region.

IV. Diplomatic Challenges and Broader Regional Instability:

The diplomatic challenges arising from the Pakistan-Iran escalation contribute to broader regional instability. The breakdown in communication, coupled with the withdrawal of ambassadors, reflects strained diplomatic ties. This not only complicates

efforts to de-escalate the situation but also sets a challenging precedent for resolving disputes through diplomatic means. The regional geopolitical complexities, including the ongoing conflicts between Israel and its adversaries, further exacerbate the diplomatic challenges. The potential spillover effect on regional dynamics could create a volatile environment with implications for international actors involved in the region.

10. IRAN'S EXPLANATION OF ATTACK:

Iran explained its attack on Pakistan as a response to a perceived threat from Jaish al Adl, a Sunni radical organization operating in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian stated that the military strikes targeted what he referred to as an "Iranian terrorist group" on Pakistani soil. He emphasized that the action was taken to address the presence of Jaish al Adl, which Iran considered a security threat. However, the attack raised questions about the timing and whether Iran adequately communicated its concerns to Pakistan before taking military action.

According to Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, its military strikes were directed against a Sunni radical organization, Jaish al-Adl, which he called an "Iranian terrorist group" operating in Pakistan. "We only targeted Iranian terrorists on Pakistani soil," and his country "respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan," Amir-Abdollahian stated.

11. PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE TO IRAN'S MISSILE ATTACK:

Pakistan, in response to Iran's missile attack, expressed strong condemnation, labeling it an "unprovoked and blatant breach" of its sovereignty. The Pakistani military reported that the attack resulted in the tragic deaths of two children and injuries to three others. The government of Pakistan, while acknowledging the importance of friendly relations with Iran, took immediate steps to lodge a protest and convey its concerns. Additionally, Pakistan recalled its ambassador from Iran as a diplomatic measure to signal its displeasure. The strong response aimed to defend Pakistan's sovereignty and highlight the need for peaceful resolutions to cross-border issues. Subsequent diplomatic talks were initiated to de-escalate tensions and restore normalcy in bilateral relations.

According to Islamabad, the country only targeted the militant hideouts of Baloch insurgency groups in Iran due to the serious threat they represented to Pakistan's national security.

12. PAKISTAN-IRAN DIPLOMATIC TIES AFTER MISSILE AND DRONE STRIKES.

Following a series of missile and drone strikes between Pakistan and Iran, the two nations have taken significant steps to restore diplomatic ties. The exchange of attacks on each other's territory led to the withdrawal of ambassadors from both capitals. However, diplomatic efforts were swiftly initiated, resulting in talks that paved the way

for the reinstatement of ambassadors to their respective posts. The willingness of both countries to engage in dialogue was evident in the discussions, with a commitment to work on all issues based on mutual trust and cooperation. This diplomatic resolution marks a crucial step towards de-escalation, emphasizing the importance of diplomatic channels in managing conflicts and fostering stability in the region.

13. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the recent escalation and subsequent restoration of diplomatic ties between Iran and Pakistan highlight the intricate dynamics of their relationship. Cross-border militancy, geopolitical alignments, and internal political developments have contributed to tensions, while economic barriers and misinterpretations have hindered the realization of the full potential of their bilateral cooperation. The implications of this escalation extend beyond the two nations, affecting the broader regional stability amid overlapping conflicts. Despite these challenges, the historical and cultural affinities, energy cooperation potential, and strategic regional partnerships underscore the importance of fostering understanding and collaboration. Moving forward, both countries need to prioritize effective communication, address trade barriers, and work collectively to promote stability, economic opportunities, and geopolitical cooperation in the region.

MANAGING PAKISTAN RELATIONS WITH THE U.S IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES

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MANAGING PAKISTAN RELATIONS WITH THE U.S IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: OPPORTUNITIES & OBSTACLES

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US-Pakistan relationship has been stuck in a prolonged period of uncertainty.

(Michael Kugelman | Director, South Asia Institute)

The normalization of U.S.–Pakistan relations stands at a critical juncture marked by the recent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. This geopolitical shift has created an opportune moment for both nations to recalibrate their longstanding relationship. As the focus pivots from the complexities of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan to collaborative efforts in counterterrorism, a window opens for enhancing mutual interests. Pakistan, grappling with economic challenges and security threats along its borders, seeks a pragmatic partnership with the United States. This reevaluation extends beyond traditional security aspects, emphasizing the need to diversify the bilateral discourse. With a youthful population facing economic uncertainties and the looming specter of climate change, a multifaceted approach involving trade and investment, targeted aid, climate action, reciprocal people-to-people exchanges, and adept navigation of U.S.–China competition emerges as the foundation for fostering a sustainable and constructive U.S.–Pakistan relationship. In this evolving landscape, both nations have the opportunity to build a partnership that addresses shared concerns and contributes to regional stability and global cooperation.

"American ties with Pakistan have frayed in recent years. Pakistan has less utility for American policymakers after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan."

(Syed Mohammad Ali | Middle East Institute)

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S.-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The historical trajectory of U.S.-Pakistan relations is marked by a complex interplay of support, disengagement, and strategic shifts. Early on, the United States emerged as a staunch supporter of Pakistan, offering financial, military, and moral backing, while Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating Sino-American relations. The Cold War era saw the United States framing its engagement with Pakistan within the broader context of its rivalry with the Soviet Union. In the late 1970s and 80s, Pakistan assumed a frontline position in the conflict against the Soviets in Afghanistan. However, the dynamic shifted in 1988 following the Soviet defeat, leading to a deprioritization of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship throughout the 1990s, with sanctions imposed after Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998. The tragic events of 9/11 brought about a dramatic resurgence in U.S.-Pakistan ties as Pakistan became a reluctant yet necessary partner in the Global War on Terror. The subsequent period was characterized by a focus on the Afghanistan conflict, influencing the ebb and flow of bilateral relations based on the exigencies of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts in the region. This nuanced history highlights the evolving nature of the relationship, often shaped by external geopolitical considerations rather than an intrinsic understanding of Pakistan's significance.

3. THE DYNAMICS OF PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS AFTER US WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN

In the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban, the dynamics of Pakistan-U.S. relations have entered a complex phase. Pakistan's civilian leaders aspire to reshape their ties with the United States, shifting the focus from security-oriented engagements to trade and economic matters. However, the nature of continued U.S. involvement in the region appears geared towards counter-terrorism efforts rather than substantial economic investments. The historical alignment between Pakistan and the Taliban adds a layer of complexity to the relationship, with Pakistan finding a degree of satisfaction in the success of its long-time ally. Yet, events in Afghanistan have disrupted the status quo, requiring Islamabad to navigate a potentially more robust Afghan government emerging post-U.S. withdrawal. Meanwhile, in its dealings with Washington, Pakistan faces a growing sense of bitterness over perceived contributions to the U.S. loss in Afghanistan. The evolving scenario underscores the need for Pakistan to redefine its engagement with the U.S., considering the changing geopolitical landscape in South Asia.

4. THE CONVERGING POINTS IN THE PAKISTAN - U.S. RELATIONSHIP

The converging points in the Pakistan-U.S. relationship can be identified as follows:

I. Counter-Terrorism Collaboration:

Despite the evolving dynamics, both nations share a common interest in counter-terrorism efforts. Addressing the challenges posed by extremist groups in the region, such as the Taliban, remains a key area of cooperation to enhance security and stability. The collaboration may involve intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and diplomatic efforts to counter the threats posed by these groups, contributing to a safer and more stable region.

"U.S. and Pakistani interests in Afghanistan appear more aligned than ever before."

(Adam Weinstein | Quincy Institute)

II. Economic Partnerships:

While the focus is shifting from security to economic collaboration, there is a mutual interest in fostering economic partnerships. Exploring avenues for trade, investments, and joint economic initiatives can provide a foundation for a more balanced and sustainable relationship. Both countries can capitalize on each other's strengths, with the U.S. offering technological expertise and investment, and Pakistan providing opportunities for economic growth and diversification.

III. Regional Stability:

Both countries recognize the importance of regional stability, especially in the context of Afghanistan. Collaborating on issues such as border management, addressing the refugee crisis, and contributing to the overall stability in South Asia remains a shared goal. By working together on regional challenges, the U.S. and Pakistan can build trust and contribute to a more secure and prosperous neighborhood.

"The United States has two vital strategic interests in Pakistan: preventing Pakistan's destabilization and to prevent large-scale nuclear conflict with India."

(Adam Weinstein | Deputy Director of the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute)

IV. Counteracting Chinese Influence:

As Pakistan deepens its ties with China, the U.S. may find common ground in mitigating the extensive influence China has in Pakistan, particularly through economic projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Finding a balance that addresses security concerns while respecting Pakistan's sovereignty can be a converging point, aligning the interests of both nations in managing external influences in the region.

V. Humanitarian and Development Initiatives:

Finding common ground in supporting humanitarian efforts, development projects, and addressing environmental challenges can be a converging point. Shared initiatives in areas like climate resilience and sustainable development can foster cooperation. By jointly tackling global challenges, such as climate change and poverty alleviation, both countries can demonstrate a commitment to shared values and principles.

VI. Balancing Regional Power Dynamics:

Recognizing the delicate balance in South Asian power dynamics, both nations may converge on the need for nuanced diplomacy to avoid exacerbating historical tensions and regional rivalries, particularly concerning India. Finding common ground in managing relationships with regional actors is crucial for stability. By fostering a balanced approach, the U.S. and Pakistan can contribute to peace and security in the broader South Asian context.

5. THE DIVERGENT POINTS BETWEEN PAKISTAN & THE U.S

The divergent points and causes of the deteriorated relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. can be identified as follows:

I. Afghanistan Policy Differences:

The diverging approaches towards Afghanistan, especially in the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's rise to power, have strained relations. Pakistan's historical support for the Taliban conflicts with U.S. interests and efforts to stabilize the region. The complexity of post-withdrawal dynamics has led to contrasting strategies, contributing to mutual distrust and strained diplomatic ties.

"The presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan held the U.S.-Pakistan relationship hostage to a failing counterinsurgency and fledgling Afghan state."

(Adam Weinstein | Deputy Director of the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute)

II. Counter-Terrorism Effectiveness:

The assessment of Pakistan's counter-terrorism measures has become a focal point of contention, with differing perspectives contributing to strained relations between the United States and Pakistan. While the U.S. accuses Pakistan of falling short in curtailing terrorism, Pakistan vehemently argues that it has undertaken substantial efforts to address this challenge. This stark disparity in evaluations has not only created a climate of mistrust but has also impeded collaborative initiatives, hindering the prospects of effective joint efforts in combating terrorism.

III. Chinese Influence and CPEC:

The strengthening economic ties between Pakistan and China, exemplified by significant projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have become a significant point of concern for the United States. The pervasive influence of China in Pakistan's economic and strategic landscape has triggered apprehensions in Washington. The U.S. interprets this deepening influence as a potential challenge to its regional interests, fostering an environment of competition and contributing to the strain in bilateral relations between the two nations.

IV. Alleged State Sponsorship of Terrorism:

Accusations by the United States of Pakistan providing safe havens for terrorist groups have intensified tensions and eroded trust between the two countries. The alleged state sponsorship of terrorism has raised serious concerns about Pakistan's commitment to the global fight against terrorism, further complicating diplomatic ties and impeding collaborative efforts to address this critical issue.

V. Nuclear Ambitions and Proliferation Concerns:

Persistent differences in the perceptions of Pakistan's nuclear ambitions, coupled with apprehensions about potential proliferation risks, have been enduring sources of tension between the U.S. and Pakistan. The United States has consistently expressed worries regarding the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, adding another layer of complexity to the diplomatic relationship between the two nations. Addressing these concerns and fostering a shared understanding on nuclear-related issues is crucial for building trust and stabilizing the overall bilateral relationship.

VI. Civil-Military Relations:

Tensions between Pakistan's civilian and military leadership, including allegations of a strengthened civil-military nexus, have complicated diplomatic efforts. The U.S. seeks stable civilian governance for effective collaboration. The internal dynamics within Pakistan's power structure have created challenges in presenting a unified front in dealings with the U.S., impacting the overall relationship.

VII. Human Rights Concerns:

Issues related to human rights abuses and governance records in Pakistan have led to criticism from the U.S. Balancing the promotion of democratic values with addressing human rights concerns has been a challenging divergence. The divergent stances on human rights issues create friction and impact the broader narrative of shared values, complicating diplomatic engagements.

VIII. Strategic Shifts in Regional Alliances:

In recent times, Pakistan has undergone significant strategic shifts in its regional alliances, marking a noteworthy departure from conventional geopolitical norms. Notably, the country has been increasingly aligning itself with China, a move that has drawn attention and raised eyebrows in Washington. This growing alignment is coupled with a broader strategy of diversifying international partnerships, a notable aspect being the pursuit of closer ties with Russia. These developments have not only caused concerns but have also triggered a realignment of traditional alliances in the region.

IX. Perceived Unreliable Alliance:

From the perspective of the United States, Pakistan's alliance is viewed through a lens of skepticism and perceived as unreliable. This perception is rooted in historical

instances where the bilateral relationship between the two nations evolved primarily based on strategic needs. Consequently, this evolution has been interpreted as opportunistic rather than indicative of a steadfast, long-term partnership. The underlying uncertainty surrounding the reliability of this alliance has introduced an element of caution and strategic recalibration in the broader U.S. foreign policy considerations.

X. Differing Priorities in South Asia:

The complex dynamics of South Asian geopolitics are further exacerbated by divergent priorities among key players in the region. The United States, in its strategic approach, seeks to maintain a delicate balance in its relationships within South Asia. In contrast, Pakistan perceives the burgeoning collaboration between the U.S. and India as a formidable challenge to its core interests. This divergence in priorities, particularly concerning India, has added layers of intricacy to the already intricate tapestry of international relations in South Asia. Consequently, the geopolitical landscape is marked by nuanced challenges and evolving power dynamics, necessitating a careful and adaptive approach by all involved parties.

"Pakistan is on the sidelines of the U.S. Indopacific strategy, which prioritizes India to contain, or at least balance, China."

(Adam Weinstein | Deputy Director of the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute)

6. PRAGMATIC MEASURES TO MAINTAIN A BALANCED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND THE U.S:

Maintaining a balanced relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. requires strategic and diplomatic efforts. Here are key ways forward:

Washington should resist viewing Pakistan through the narrow lens of the "War on Terror" or great power competition. Instead it should pursue its interests through more normalized relations, while recognizing U.S. limitations in influencing events in Pakistan or the region.

(Adam Weinstein | Deputy Director of the Middle East program at the Quincy Institute)

I. Open and Transparent Communication:

Establishing open and transparent communication channels is crucial. Regular and honest dialogue between leadership from both countries can help address concerns, build trust, and prevent misunderstandings. Creating a platform for candid discussions fosters a shared understanding of each other's perspectives and contributes to a more transparent diplomatic relationship.

II. Collaborative Counter-Terrorism Efforts:

Enhance collaboration on counter-terrorism initiatives. Both countries share an interest in regional stability, and joint efforts to combat terrorism can contribute to mutual

security and strengthen the bilateral relationship. Coordinated intelligence sharing, joint military exercises, and strategic planning can form the basis of an effective counter-terrorism partnership.

III. Economic Cooperation and Trade:

Foster economic cooperation and trade ties. Emphasize initiatives that promote economic development in Pakistan, create job opportunities, and diversify trade relationships. This can reduce dependency on a single partner and contribute to mutual economic growth. Exploring avenues for joint investment, trade agreements, and economic partnerships can lay the groundwork for a more resilient economic relationship.

IV. Balanced Regional Alliances:

Encourage Pakistan to maintain balanced regional alliances. While it is natural for countries to have strategic partners, a balanced approach that considers the interests of all regional actors can help avoid unnecessary tensions. Diplomatically encouraging a nuanced and inclusive approach to regional relationships can contribute to stability and reduce the potential for conflicts.

V. Human Rights and Governance:

Address human rights concerns diplomatically. Encourage improvements in governance and human rights practices while respecting Pakistan's sovereignty. Constructive engagement on these issues can lead to positive developments. Acknowledging shared values and promoting a collaborative approach to human rights can foster a sense of common purpose and understanding.

VI. Strategic Regional Initiatives:

Collaborate on strategic regional initiatives that benefit both countries. This may include joint efforts in areas such as infrastructure development, energy projects, and regional stability, contributing to shared prosperity. By aligning interests in key regional initiatives, both nations can work together to address common challenges and enhance mutual benefits.

VII. People-to-People Diplomacy:

Promote people-to-people diplomacy to strengthen cultural ties and mutual understanding. Exchange programs, educational partnerships, and cultural initiatives can create a foundation for lasting relationships beyond political considerations. Building connections at the grassroots level enhances cultural understanding and fosters a sense of goodwill between the citizens of both countries.

VIII. Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan:

Cooperate on efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Given the shared interest in a stable Afghanistan, collaboration on diplomatic and development initiatives in the region

can foster trust and contribute to regional peace. Working together to address the complex challenges in Afghanistan can create a common ground for cooperation, leading to positive outcomes for both nations and the broader region.

7. THE FUTURE OF US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The future of U.S.-Pakistan relations undergoes a transformative phase post the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, with Pakistan's civilian leaders expressing a desire for a shift towards economic collaboration rather than a predominant focus on security. However, the evolving dynamics are shaped by the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, a group historically supported by Pakistan, introducing complexities as Islamabad navigates its regional position. As both nations grapple with historical grievances and bitterness over perceived contributions to the challenges faced in Afghanistan, rebuilding trust and fostering a future partnership requires candid dialogues, a recalibration of priorities, and a constructive approach to diplomacy. The challenge lies in aligning U.S. counter-terrorism interests with Pakistan's economic aspirations, while addressing concerns and adapting to the shifting geopolitical realities in South Asia.

8. CONCLUSION:

The trajectory of U.S.-Pakistan relations stands at a crossroads, presenting both opportunities and obstacles. The recent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan has prompted a reevaluation of the bilateral relationship, offering a chance for recalibration beyond the historical focus on security concerns. While converging points such as counter-terrorism collaboration, economic partnerships, and regional stability provide a foundation for cooperation, divergent issues ranging from Afghanistan policy disparities to concerns over Chinese influence pose significant challenges. The path forward requires pragmatic measures, including open communication, collaborative counter-terrorism efforts, economic cooperation, and a balanced approach to regional alliances. As both nations navigate the complexities of the post-withdrawal landscape, the future of U.S.-Pakistan relations hinges on the ability to bridge gaps, foster trust, and forge a partnership that addresses shared concerns while adapting to evolving geopolitical realities in South Asia. The coming years will test the resilience of this relationship, emphasizing the need for strategic diplomacy, flexibility, and a shared commitment to building a stable and constructive partnership.

MISCELLANEOUS CURRENT AFFAIRS

MOST SIGNIFICANT WORLD EVENTS IN 2023

1. CHINESE SPY BALLOON:

A Chinese spy balloon traversing the United States for a week in February 2023 dominated global headlines for several days. The balloon, detected over Alaska on January 28, crossed over some of the critical military facilities of the World's most powerful military including the Malmstrom Air Force base in Montana, a location housing nuclear assets.

The controversy resulting from this incident ultimately forced the USAF to dispatch a fifth-generation F-22 fighter armed with an AIM-9X Sidewinder missile to intercept the balloon over water.

China, on the other hand, continued to insist that it was a weather balloon engaged in meteorological research that inadvertently drifted into US airspace due to weather patterns.

Recent revelations by the American media highlight that US intelligence agencies found that the Chinese surveillance balloon used an American internet service provider to send short, periodic transmissions of data related to navigation and location. The internet service provider remains unidentified.

2. DEVASTATING QUAKES:

In the early hours of February 6, one of the deadliest earthquakes in a century flattens entire cities in southeast Turkey, killing at least 56,000 people, with nearly 6,000 others killed across the border in Syria.

Seven months later, on September 8, Morocco suffers the deadliest quake in its history, centred on the Atlas mountains. Nearly 3,000 people are killed.

Two images come to define the devastating 7.8-magnitude tremor: that of a father holding the hand of his dead 15-year-old daughter, protruding from under a collapsed building in Kahramanmaras, the epicentre, and that of a newborn baby rescued from the rubble while still umbilically attached to her dead mother.

3. IRAN-SAUDI DÉTENTE:

There was another key development that dominated the news cycle for weeks before the Israel-Hamas war dominated news cycle coming out of West Asia.

China managed to broker a surprise detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia in **March**. The duo have a history of centuries-old rivalry originating out of the sects of religion they represent.

The first formal meeting between the top diplomats of the two nations in seven years took place on 6 April, 2023 in Beijing. On the occasion, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud signed a joint statement announcing the resumption of diplomatic relations with immediate effect.

Also, a few days prior to the meeting of the two Foreign Ministers in Beijing on 6 April 2023, President Raisi received a visit invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to which the Iranian President responded by inviting the Saudi King to visit Tehran. A Saudi trade delegation also attended the Iran Expo 2023, which was held in Tehran from 7-10 May 2023. On 23 May, 2023, Iran named Alireza Enayati as its new ambassador to Saudi Arabia after 7-year hiatus. Iran reopened its embassy in Riyadh along with the consulate general and office to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jeddah on June 6 and 7 2023.

4. CIVIL WAR WRACKS SUDAN:

2023 was supposed to be the year that Sudan became a democracy. The Sudanese people instead got a civil war. The conflict had its roots in the protests that led Sudan's military in April 2019 to overthrow the country's longtime dictator Omar al-Bashir. The new military junta struck an agreement with civilian groups to share power and work toward elections. However, in October 2021, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo, the head of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, led another coup. In December 2022, the two men yielded to popular pressure and agreed to lead a two-year transition to civilian rule. That agreement made Burhan and Hemedti co-equals and called for the RSF to be integrated into the SAF. Neither that agreement nor the marriage-of-convenience between the two men lasted. On **April 15, 2023**, RSF forces attacked SAF bases across the country. Efforts to negotiate a ceasefire went nowhere. By the fall, the RSF controlled most of Khartoum, Sudan's capital, while the SAF controlled Port Sudan, the country's main seaport. Fighting was particularly heavy in Darfur, where the Janjaweed, the RSF's predecessor, conducted an ethnic-cleansing campaign against the region's largely non-Arab population back in the early 2000's. As the year came a close, the fighting had killed more than 10,000 people and displaced 5.6 million more—or close to 15 percent of Sudan's population.

5. INDIA PASSES CHINA AS THE WORLD'S MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY:

For the last century, if not longer, China has had the world's largest population. That ended in 2023. India now does. According to the UNFPA's State of World Population Report 2023, released in April 2023, India became the most populous country in the world, surpassing China. Its population is estimated to be 1.43 billion people. India will likely remain the most populous country for decades to come. China's population is both shrinking and aging. Demographers project that the Chinese population will fall by 100 million people by mid-century, or more than the population of all but fifteen countries in the world today. Over the same time period, China's median age will rise from thirty-nine years-old to fifty-one. India's population, meanwhile, should reach nearly 1.7 billion by mid-century with a median age of thirty-nine. While demography isn't destiny, it does constrain and enable every country's opportunities. Countries with younger, growing populations tend to have more vibrant workforces that consume more, and as a result, enjoy higher economic growth rates. The Chinese government is facing increased pressure to invest in the country's social safety net, an expensive proposition that could take resources away from other priorities.

6. THE LOST SUBMERSIBLE

The Titan submersible carrying five people onboard imploded in the North Atlantic Ocean on June 18. The submersible was part of a deep sea extreme tourism mission to visit the 111-year-old wreckage of the *Titanic* more than 12,000 feet underwater. After days of gruelling search and rescue mission, officials confirmed that a debris field was found around 500m away from the bow of the *Titanic* that was consistent with that of the 22-foot submersible.

Passengers onboard were Stockton Rush, the CEO of OceanGate, the company that ran and designed the expedition, Paul-Henri Nargeolet, a French deep-sea explorer and *Titanic* expert, Hamish Harding, a British businessman, Shahzada Dawood, a Pakistani-British businessman, and his son Suleman.

7. A BLIP IN CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS

The India-Canada diplomatic relationship turned frosty this year after Canadian PM Justin Trudeau claimed that there was a "potential link" between the Indian government and the killing of a pro-Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada on June 18, 2023. Nijjar, who was the head of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara Sahib in Surrey and the chief of the separatist organisation Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF), was shot by two unidentified men outside the gurdwara.

Trudeau's accusations, which India has denied as "absurd and motivated" has set off a chain of reactions, including the expulsion of several Canadian diplomats from India

the temporary suspension of visa services in Canada. Months later, the United States Department of Justice (DoJ) charged an Indian national, Nikhil Gupta, for his involvement in a plot to murder a US-based Khalistani leader. Global temperatures shattered records.

MUTINY IN RUSSIA BY WAGNAR GROUP:

The chief of Russia's Wagner Private Military Company, Yevgeny Prigozhin, led a short-lived mutiny on June 24 this year. His act pushed the Vladimir Putin regime into an unprecedented internal security crisis. Leading a convoy of armed men and armoured vehicles towards Moscow, he demanded the ouster of Russia's top defence officials.

His move created alarm elsewhere after news of the takeover of Russia's Southern Military District headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, the largest city in southern Russia, surfaced.

However, Prigozhin abruptly ended his so-called "march of justice" after Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko brokered a deal to allow him and his forces to come to his country. Prigozhin was later killed in August in a plane explosion in Russia.

Russian president Vladimir Putin's right-hand man, the country's Security Council secretary Nikolai Patrushev, ordered the assassination of Wagner mercenary group chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported citing Western intelligence and a former Russian intelligence officer.

9. BRICS SUMMIT:

The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) bloc met for its 15th annual leader's summit in Johannesburg on August 22–24. The BRICS summit is seen as one of India's biggest geopolitical wins of 2023. India was one of the key players in the admission of six new member countries: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE). These global South countries will officially join the group in January 2024.

10. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) OFFERS PROMISE AND PERIL.

AI burst into the public consciousness last year with the release of ChatGPT. In 2023, the technology based on so-called large-language models not only got better—the latest version of ChatGPT is reportedly ten times more advanced than its predecessor—governments, companies, and individuals moved quickly to exploit its potential. That triggered heated debates over whether AI is unleashing a new era of human creativity and prosperity, or opening a Pandora's box that will produce a nightmarish future. Optimists pointed to how AI was unleashing scientific breakthroughs at an unprecedented pace across a range of fields, enabling rapid drug design, unlocking medical mysteries, and

solving seemingly unsolvable mathematical problems. Pessimists warned that the technology is developing faster than the ability of humans to assess and mitigate the harm it might cause, whether that is creating mass unemployment, hardening existing societal inequalities, or triggering humanity's extinction. Geoffrey Hinton, one of the pioneers of AI, quit his job at Google to warn of AI's dangers, and technology leaders like Elon Musk and Steve Wozniak signed an open letter warning that AI poses a "profound risk to society and humanity." Meanwhile, skeptics argued that much of AI's promise will be derailed because the models will soon begin training on their own outputs, leading them to become divorced from actual human behavior. Governments seem not to be moving fast enough, whether individually or collectively, to harness the benefits of AI and contain its risks.

➤ OpenAI's Roller Coaster Year

The year started with Microsoft extending its investment and partnership with OpenAI by \$10 billion, as Sam Altman's company went on to launch its more powerful GPT-4 model along with other key features throughout the year like image recognition, image generation, and deeper custom model instructions with custom GPTs.

While the year seemed to be progressing perfectly for OpenAI at the forefront of the AI hype wave, the end of November saw Sam Altman fired as CEO of the company in one of the most shocking board decisions in recent business history. Sam Altman was reinstated as CEO within 72 hours, giving the tech world just a few days of pause to reflect on the issues of governance and leadership in one of the fastest growing industries.

11. AZERBAIJAN SEIZES NAGORNO-KARABAKH, LEADING TO CAUCASUS EXODUS:

The aftershocks of the collapse of the Soviet Union continue to be felt three decades later. The countries that emerged from the Soviet collapse had borders that often didn't align with where national groups lived—sowing the seeds for conflict. The Nagorno-Karabakh enclave in Azerbaijan, for instance, was populated almost entirely by ethnic Armenians uninterested in being governed by Baku. In late 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence, triggering a war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. When the fighting ended in 1994 with a Russian-brokered ceasefire, Nagorno-Karabakh had gained de facto independence along with a chunk of Azerbaijani territory. Despite intermittent cross-border attacks, the ceasefire held until large-scale fighting erupted in September 2020. After six weeks, Russia negotiated another ceasefire. This one left Azerbaijan in control of much of Nagorno-Karabakh. Tensions remained high. In September 2023, Azerbaijan attacked again. Within days, it overran the territory it did not already control and announced it would begin the enclave's "reintegration." Within one week, more than one hundred thousand Armenians, or roughly 85 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, fled to Armenia. The exodus sparked protests in

Armenia over its government's failure to protect fellow Armenians and raised questions about why Russia failed to prevent the enclave's demise. The safety of the remaining Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh could be a continuing flashpoint between Armenia and Azerbaijan. So too could the Zangezur Corridor, a small slice of Armenian territory that connects Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani enclave bordered by Armenia, Iran, and Turkey.

12. U.S.-CHINA TENSIONS CONTINUE TO SIMMER

As 2023 began, U.S.-China tensions seemed to be easing. The prior November, Joe Biden and Xi Jinping had a productive meeting on the margins of the G-20 summit in Bali. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to visit Beijing in February to discuss putting "guardrails" on the two countries' increasingly tense geopolitical rivalry. But then a Chinese surveillance balloon appeared over the United States. It drifted across the country for a week before a U.S. Air Force F-22 Raptor shot it down off the coast of South Carolina. Beijing insisted that the balloon had been blown off course while monitoring the weather, an explanation the United States rejected. The incident inflamed political passions in the United States and prompted Blinken to postpone his visit to Beijing. Most troubling, Chinese officials refused to take a call from U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin after the balloon was shot down, highlighting the lack of an established communication channel between the two superpowers. Blinken finally travelled to Beijing in June for what State Department officials called "constructive" talks. Those conversations did not stop Washington from imposing additional restrictions on trade with China or persuade Beijing to ease its harassment of Taiwan, the Philippines, or U.S. military forces in Asia. Biden and Xi met in November on the sidelines of the 2023 APEC Leaders' Forum in San Francisco. The talks produced a few minor agreements but no major breakthroughs. Agreement on a *modus vivendi* continues to elude the world's two most powerful countries.

- **Xi Jinping's Visit to the U.S**

After nearly a year of further entrenchment in the newly fractured geopolitical landscape, November saw U.S.-China relations thaw as Xi Jinping met with Joe Biden in his first visit to the U.S. since 2017.

13. RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR SPILLS INTO SECOND YEAR:

More than a year after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the war continued with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy scrambling to mobilise a continuous supply of soldiers and weapons as key allies, Europe and America, slowed down the funding due to changes in internal politics. Though there is no concrete information on the number of casualties, UN estimates say that more than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed. A New York Times report said that over 5 lakh Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have been killed so far.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, has maintained that the war will go on unless Kyiv does a deal that takes Moscow's security concerns into account. "Either we get an agreement, agree on certain parameters (on the size and strength of Ukraine's military)... or we solve this by force. This is what we will strive for," he said.

Hopes were high early in 2023 that a Ukrainian counteroffensive might break Russia's hold on eastern Ukraine and possibly Crimea. The much-awaited counteroffensive began in early June. Despite inflicting massive losses on Russian troops, the battlelines barely moved. The Russian military had used the winter and spring to prepare formidable defenses. In early November, Ukraine's top general described the fighting as a "stalemate" and admitted that "there will most likely be no deep and beautiful breakthrough." Indeed, as the general spoke, Russia had gained more territory over the course of the year than Ukraine had. Diplomatic conversations quickly turned to whether Ukraine could sustain, let alone win, a war of attrition that seemed to favor Russia given its substantially larger economy and population. Despite suffering horrific losses, Russia had double the number of troops in Ukraine in fall 2023 compared to the start of the invasion and the Russian economy was on a war footing. Meanwhile, "Ukraine fatigue" had begun to emerge in the West, especially in the United States as Republican lawmakers balked at sending Kyiv more aid. With long-term trends potentially favoring Russia, calls grew for Ukraine to pivot from offense to defense and to seek a ceasefire. Whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would agree to halt the fighting is debatable. He likely believes that time is on his side, especially if the U.S. election next November delivers a president looking to cut ties with Ukraine.

14. G20 SUMMIT

India emerged as the leader of the global South in the year 2023. Not only successfully hosting this global summit, but India also managed leaders with disparate views on a single platform to issue a statement. Indian under its presidency ensured it became the voice for the African nations with the induction of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20.

India organised its inaugural G20 Leaders' Summit on September 9-10. The summit saw the participation of 43 heads of various governments, including US President Biden, Canada PM Justin Trudeau, and British PM Rishi Sunak. Under the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future," the G20 leaders discussed several important topics of global concern.

"We are determined to steer the world out of its current challenges and build a safer, stronger, more resilient, inclusive and healthier future for our people and the planet," G20 New Delhi leaders' declaration.

15. HAMAS ATTACKS ISRAEL:

The Middle East looked promising in late September 2023. The Abraham Accords were deepening ties between Israel and Arab countries. Speculation abounded that Saudi Arabia might soon establish diplomatic relations with Israel. A ceasefire in Yemen's bitter civil war was holding. These trends prompted National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to declare: "The Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades now." That changed just eight days later, on **October 7**, when Hamas attacked Israel. Roughly 1,200 Israelis were killed, the deadliest day in Israel's history. Some 240 people were taken hostage. Vowing to eradicate Hamas, Israel launched airstrikes against Gaza and then invaded northern Gaza. A negotiated pause in the fighting at the end of November secured the release of roughly one hundred hostages. But fighting soon resumed with Israeli troops moving into southern Gaza. The soaring death toll for Palestinian civilians, most of them women and children, fueled worldwide complaints that Israel was committing war crimes. The ongoing Israel-Hamas war in Gaza has killed nearly 20,000 Palestinians, wounded tens of thousands more, and displaced 90% of the 2.3 million residents of the besieged enclave. Israel denied the charge, arguing that Hamas was using Palestinian civilians as human shields. Joe Biden unequivocally backed Israel's right to retaliate and traveled to Israel early in the conflict to show his support. By early December, however, U.S. officials were publicly urging Israel to do more to protect civilians or risk "strategic defeat." Initial fears that the conflict with Gaza might lead to a broader Middle East war eased by year's end but did not disappear. How the conflict will end and what will follow it remain open questions.

16. ARGENTINA LURCHES RIGHT:

In November, Argentina lurches to the right with the election of libertarian wild card candidate, Javier Milei, on a promise to "blow up" the central bank, dollarise the economy, privatise health and education and hold a vote on repealing abortion laws.

The economist and TV pundit known for his foul-mouthed rants against the political "caste" rides a wave of fury over decades of economic decline and double-digit inflation under the long-dominant Peronist (centre-left) coalition.

His vow to return Argentina to its "golden age" at the dawn of the 20th century draws comparisons with former US president Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

17. THE HOTTEST YEAR ON RECORD:

Climate change is no longer a future threat. It is the world's new reality. Two thousand twenty-three is likely the hottest year on record. Global temperatures have not been this high in 125,000 years, and they are poised to blow past the 2 degree Celsius limit enshrined in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The result has been extreme weather events

around the globe, ranging from historic wildfires to extreme drought to record flooding. The once-obscure phrase “wet bulb temperature” entered the lexicon as people worldwide learned firsthand that high temperatures combined with high humidity can kill. Optimists pointed to developments that could turn things around. Total investments in clean energy have soared. The cost of wind and solar power continues to fall and many emitters will reach peak emissions in the next few decades. Hydrogen is being touted as source of clean energy. The first commercial ventures aimed at sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere are becoming operational, while scientists experiment with “enhanced rock weathering” that uses minerals like basalt to passively absorb carbon dioxide. However, serious doubts remain about how fast and how widely such technologies can be scaled up, especially as fossil fuel production and emissions continue to rise. Diplomats gathered in solemn forums like the twenty-eighth Conference of Parties (COP-28) to discuss plans and agreements. But these meetings seemed to attest to the saying that “when all is said and done, more is said than done.” Humanity may have missed its chance to avoid catastrophic climate change.

18. THE NEPAL QUAKE

More than 150 people were killed and hundreds of others injured after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck western Nepal on November 3. The quake, whose epicentre was at Ramidanda, about 550 km from the capital city of Kathmandu, was the country’s deadliest since 2015.

19. RED SEA SHIPPING ATTACKS

Hamas’ attacks on Israel on October 7th kicked off Israel’s war against Hamas, which has been followed by Houthi rebel attacks on shipping lines in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait of the Red Sea.

The low-cost drone attacks have resulted in many major shipping firms redirecting their container-ships around all of Africa (extending their journeys by as much as 25%), while the U.S. has grappled with the advent of low-cost drone warfare costing the country millions in missiles as they’ve looked to protect ships in the strait.

Hundreds of ships are avoiding the Suez Canal and sailing an extra 4,000 miles around Africa, burning fuel, inflating costs and adding 10 days of travel or more in each direction.

They are avoiding one of the world’s most important shipping routes, the Red Sea, where for months the Iranian-backed Houthi militia has attacked ships with drones and missiles from positions in Yemen.

The Houthis have said they are seeking to disrupt shipping links with Israel to force Israel to end its military campaign in Gaza. But ships connected to more than a dozen countries have been targeted.

20. THE SPACE RACE HEATS UP:

One hundred and fifty years ago the advice was: "Go west." Today the advice might be: "Go to the heavens." Both countries and companies are making big bets on space. Seventy-seven countries have space agencies; sixteen countries can launch payloads into space. The moon has been of particular interest. Russia's moon effort ended in disappointment in August when its lander crashed into the moon's surface. Days later, India became the fourth country to land an unmanned vehicle on the moon, and the first to do so near the moon's south polar region. Two weeks later, India launched a mission to study the sun. China and the United States also have ambitious moon programs, with NASA aiming to return astronauts to the moon by 2025. These and other space-related efforts are fueling concerns that geopolitical rivalries will lead to the militarization of space. The surge in interest in space has also highlighted the lack of rules governing space operations. The United States has promoted the Artemis Accords to "govern the civil exploration and use of outer space." China and many other space-faring countries have declined to sign on. Working out rules for space is complicated by the fact that private companies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Virgin Galactic play a large role in space operations. That raises questions about profit motives and national obligations. But the surge in space activity also raises questions about whether the seemingly mundane problem of space junk will complicate exploration of the heavens.

➤ Moon, the new frontier

The space race heats up in 2023, with rising star India becoming the first nation to successfully land an unmanned craft on the Moon's south pole in August, just days after a Russian lunar vehicle crashed into its surface.

Over half a century after US astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, several countries are jostling to return humans to the celestial body.

NASA is aiming for a crewed mission by 2025, China for 2030 and India for 2040.

21. BANGLADESH ELECTIONS AND PROTESTS:

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won the re-election for a fifth term in the national election that were conducted on 7 January, 2023 amidst the boycott by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by former PM Khaleda Zia, who is currently in jail.

Sheikh Hasina's party Awami League has won a fourth consecutive term in the 12th parliamentary election, marking the second lowest voter turnout since the reinstatement of democracy in 1991.

Bangladesh, home to more than 170 million people, held general elections on January 7. The elections followed months of growing tension that saw political protests turn violent and the arrests of thousands of political opposition members.

For months leading up to the election, the main opposition party, the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League (AL) to step down in favor of a caretaker government to oversee the election. The government rejected this request, and the opposition ultimately boycotted Sunday's election. According to the Associated Press, turnout for the election was around 40%.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina secured a fourth straight term in Sunday's election, with her Awami League party winning nearly 75% of seats in parliament, according to Reuters.

22. TAIWAN'S 2024 ELECTIONS:

On January 13th 2024, voters elected Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party as Taiwan's next president. Mr Lai won 40% of the vote; his closest rival, Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang, won 34%. How to deal with China was a central theme of the campaign.

On January 13, 2024, Taiwan held elections for its presidency and 113-seat legislature, the Legislative Yuan. The run-up to the election drew global attention because of the growing tensions in the Taiwan Strait. Since current president Tsai Ing-wen was elected in 2016, official cross-strait dialogue has been suspended, and there is deep concern about China's growing use of "gray zone" tactics and the rising possibility of actual hostilities. With the elections now concluded and Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate William Lai the victor, all eyes are on the ongoing transition, which will culminate in Lai's inauguration on May 20.

Lai Ching-te, also known as William Lai, is a softly spoken former doctor who has held almost every top political post in Taiwan. He was a legislator for over a decade, then a popular mayor of the southern city of Tainan. Mr Lai is most appealing to hardline independence supporters, but in the past he has also been popular with centrist voters. Distrusted by China, he once described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence". Mr Lai has promised to stick to Ms Tsai's careful dictum: that because Taiwan is already independent, it needs no further declarations.

23. WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM ANNUAL MEETING 2024 AT DAVOS:

The 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum was held between 15-19 January in Davos, Switzerland. The meeting was held under the theme Rebuilding Trust and featured over 200 sessions with leading public figures. The meeting was also attended by over 60 heads of states and government and nearly 300 ministers and other political leaders, several of which delivered public addresses.
